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april 2002

NEW CASTLEVANIA: FIRST PICS OF WHITE NIGHT NOCTURNE

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SUPERMAN
SHADOW OF APOKOLIPS
FIRST LOOK AT THE MAN OF STEEL'S PS2 DEBUT

TEKKEN 4
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SHADOWMAN 2
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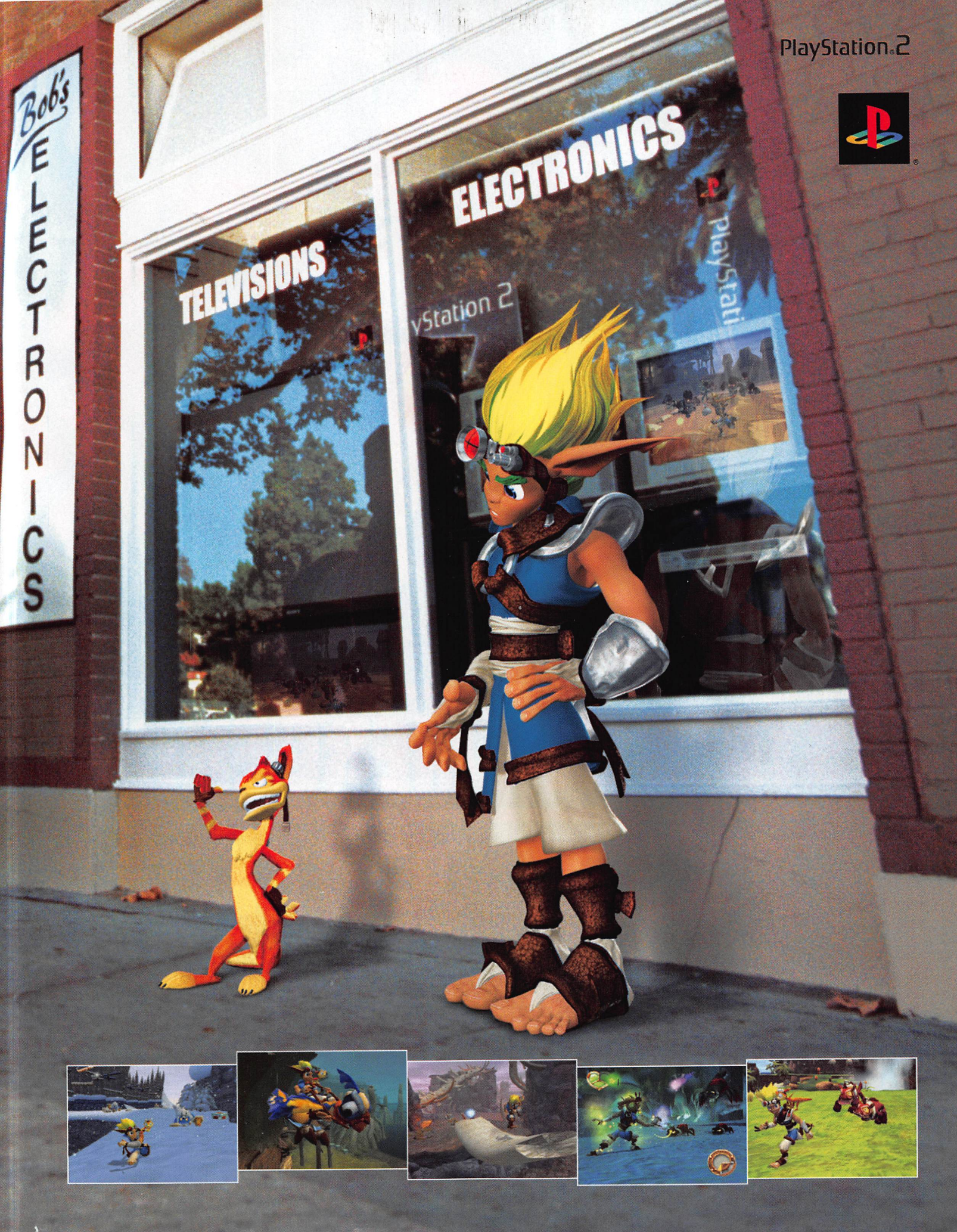
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

NAUGHTY DOG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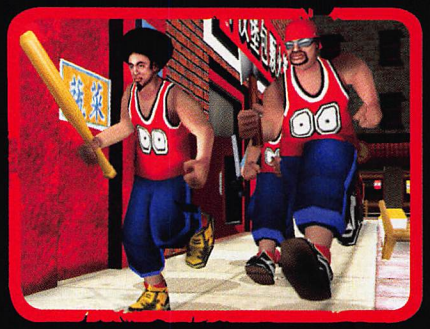
STATE OF EMERGENCY



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FIGHT TONS OF PEOPLE AT ONE TIME, USING SPECIAL SKILLS AND BRUTE FORCE

MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore

Violence

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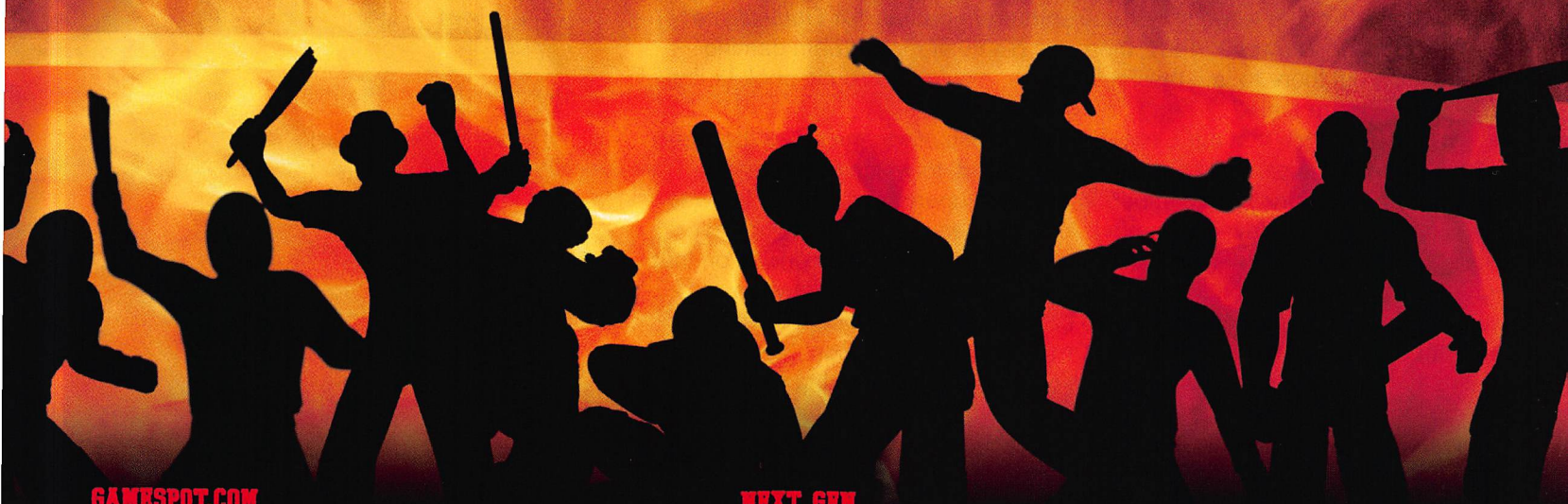

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PICK UP ITEMS OFF THE STREET AND USE THEM TO FIGHT YOUR OPPRESSORS

DEEP SELECTION OF HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING MOVES AND TONS OF SUPER-DESTRUCTIVE WEAPONS ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL

PlayStation.2 VIS R*

play

vol. 1 issue 3

LOOK AT ALL THOSE DOTS

This month's cover represents the forthcoming video-game resurgence (and a vindication of sorts) of one of America's most cherished icons, Superman. But it wasn't one we entered into lightly, being somewhat opposed to commercial covers here at **play**, home of the hardcore gamer and all-around media hounds of the world. Where all enthusiast games like *Gunvalkyrie* have a place in the world. Plus, there are plenty of mainstream gaming magazines out there to tout the Tony Hawks, movie and comic-book tie-ins of the world. Or are there?

In a rare instance that our Exec. Editor was actually in the office (between press junkets), he carefully breached the subject, to which I immediately quipped, "That's funny," remembering the last Superman game, which was like kryptonite to my love for gaming. After pondering it in-house, however, swishing it around in our little den of iniquity, we came to the conclusion that, given today's market and the amount of crossover going on between comics, movies and games (which is kind of what we're all about), this may be a great opportunity to break the ice. Once regarded as poison, these mega licenses may finally become as high in quality as the marketing campaigns that usually fuel them—and who better than **play** to point that out? Recently, *Batman: Vengeance* vindicated the Caped Crusader after an abysmal N64 and PS outing, and *Spider-Man*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Scooby Doo*, *Taz: Wanted*, *The Thing*, and we're sure *The Matrix* all look very promising.

So, as we do with every cover, we decided to just let the game do the talking, and after a brief look at an early version and a conversation with the game's producer, we came away feeling quite confident that The Man of Steel is in good hands, and that in all likelihood, this is going to be a great game.

And there you have it. Superman on the cover. Don't get used to this, though: I'm sure we'll drudge up some little known A+ game aimed squarely at the enthusiast market for next month. In fact, we already have—and it's going to be amazing!

DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

"ONCE REGARDED AS POISON, THESE MEGA LICENSES MAY FINALLY BECOME AS HIGH QUALITY AS THE MARKETING CAMPAIGNS..."

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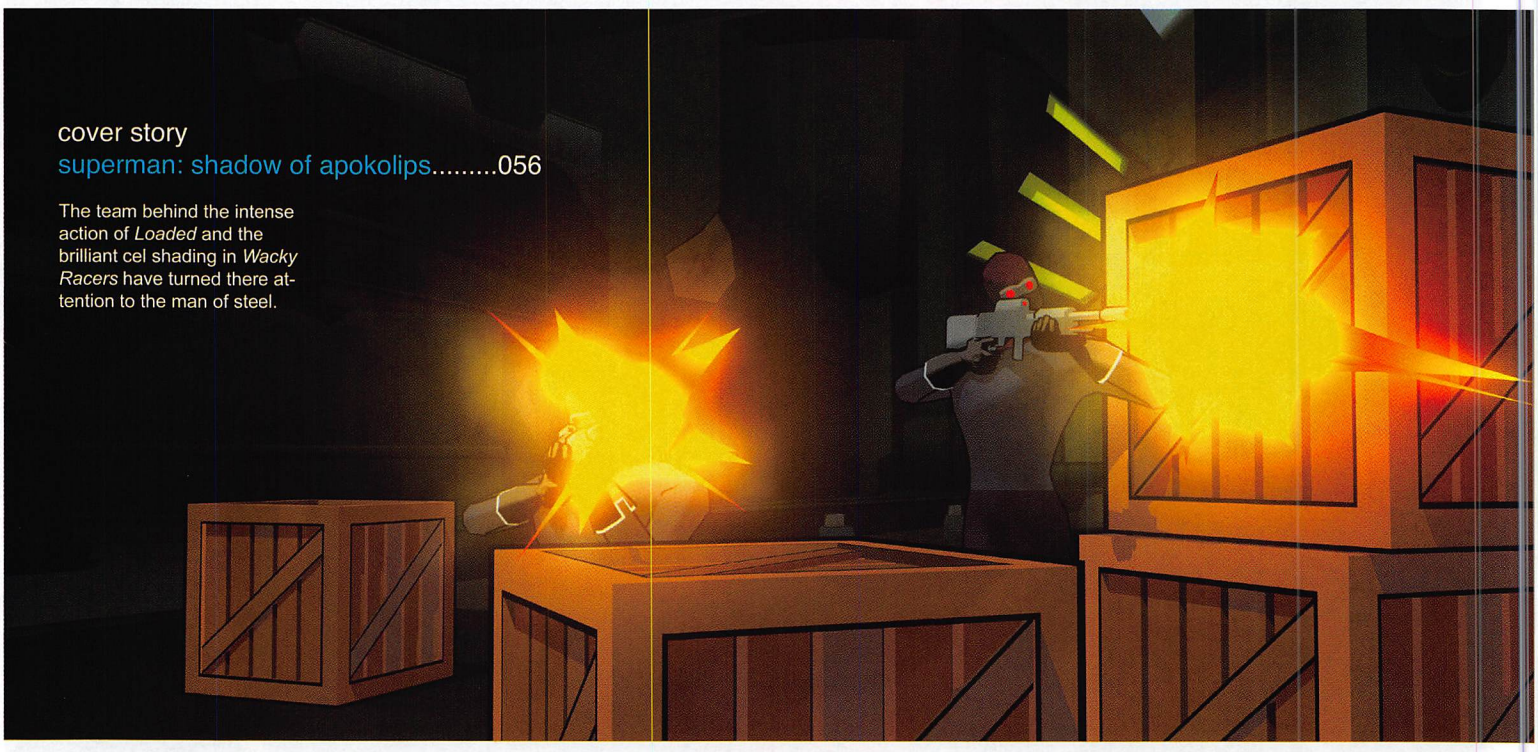

cover story
superman: shadow of apokolips.....056

The team behind the intense action of *Loaded* and the brilliant cel shading in *Wacky Racers* have turned there attention to the man of steel.

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tekken 4.....028

Fresh from the arcades Namco is readying the 4th installment of their premier fighting franchise for its PS2 debut, as only they can.

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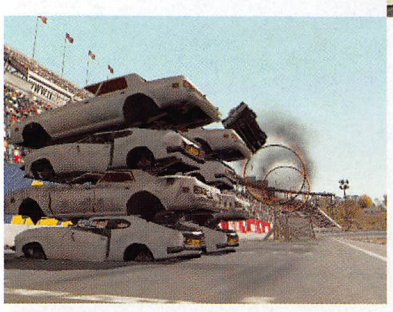
Journey deep into the belly of the beast. With New Orleans as your hub you will journey as the living and the dead in a quest to vanquish the ultimate evil.

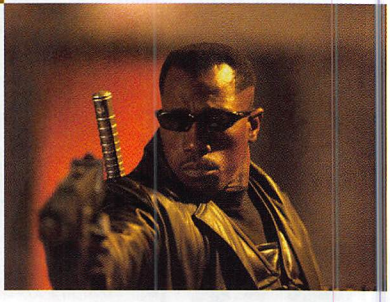


stuntman.....024

Didn't make it all the way to Fear Factor? You can still risk your life in the name of Hollywood. Take the wheel in Infogrames latest offering from the team that brought us Driver.

blade II interview.....096

Blade is back, and this time he's protecting his nemeses. We talk with the writer of Blade II, David S. Goyer. It's a bloody good read.



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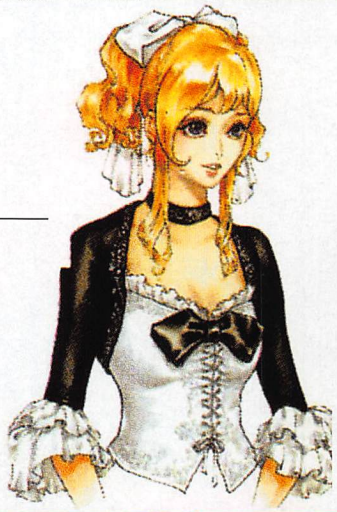
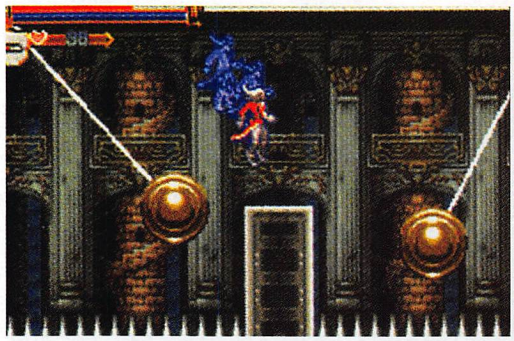
edited by **play** magazine staff

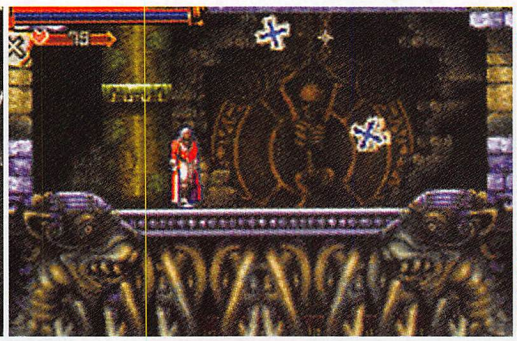
COUNT THE DAYS

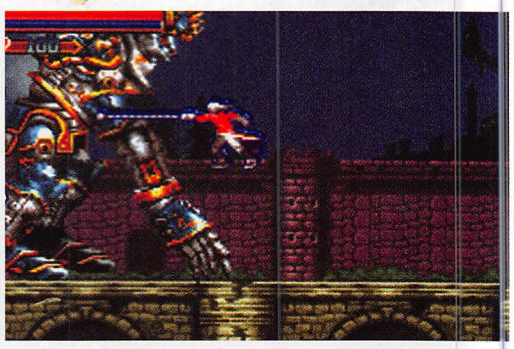
Music to every gamer's ears—Konami's latest incarnation of *Castlevania*, *White Night Nocturne*, draws near...



Konami's next stab at *Castlevania*, hot on the heels of the GBA game of the year, *Circle of the Moon*, will be *White Night Nocturne*, starring Jeust Belmont, a descendant of Simon. The gameplay, reminiscent of both *Circle* and *Symphony of the Night*, encompasses the infamous Belmont whip along with an assortment of pick-ups, and the ability to enchant them via spell books. The game also promises more refined animation compared to *Circle*, a larger map, a much-needed "quick save" option, and the use of "L" and "R" to dash. Essentially, they have improved upon the original in every way possible. Beyond *White Night*, more *Castlevania* sequels are in the planning stages. Where and on which consoles they will land remains to be seen. *White Night Nocturne* will be in full force at this year's E3, along with, we're told, other surprises from Konami. Might *Contra* make a comeback under the Nintendo banner? One can only pray.



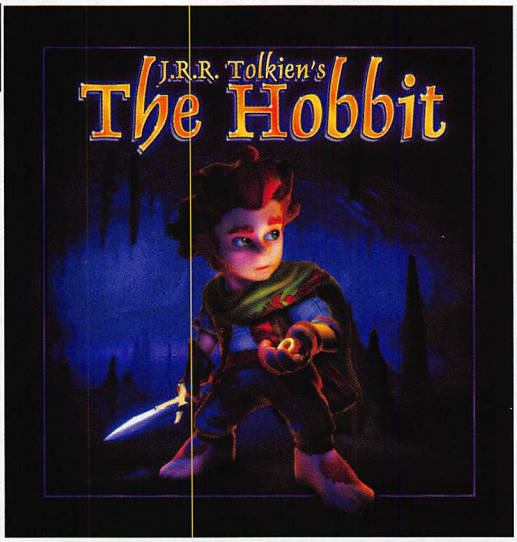




HOBBITRAIL

It begins! Vivendi readies *The Hobbit* for a 2003 game debut...

Provided you can wait until 2003 for a Hobbit fix, Sierra—now a hub of the Vivendi Universal mother-ship—has begun development of *The Hobbit*, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's worldwide best-selling novel. Austin, Texas-based developer, Inevitable Entertainment, has dubbed the game a third-person action-adventure set in the world of Middle Earth, starring, of course, Bilbo Baggins. "*The Hobbit* is one of the preeminent fantasy works of all time and is perfectly suited to be the inspiration for a great game," said Mike Ryder, president of Sierra Entertainment, Inc. "The book provides a tremendous amount of rich material from which we expect to make a fantasy game that lives up to the extremely high expectations of Tolkien's fans worldwide." With a comfy development time and Sierra at their back, a great game seems inevitable.



SONY LOGS ONLINE

Sony Computer Entertainment recently released this list of network games as the PlayStation 2 journeys online in Japan this April.

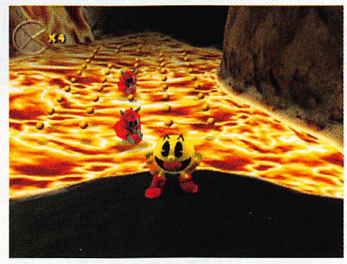
Arika *The Dungeon of Doruaga*
Atlus untitled massively multiplayer online RPG
Capcom *Automodellista*, *Biohazard Online*
From Software *Armored Core: Sigma*
Genki *Shutoku Battle Online*
Hudson *Bomberman Online*
Koei *Nobunaga's Ambition Online*
Konami untitled music and sports game
Namco *Clockwork Online*, untitled action, *Ace Combat*, untitled sports game
Sega *Guru Guru Onsen*, *Hundred Swords*, untitled simulation, untitled racing
Sony *Arc the Lad Online*, *Kumata*, *Gran Turismo Online*, *Minna no Golf Online*
Square *Final Fantasy XI*
Takara untitled board game
Tecmo untitled MMORPG

Pac-Man's back, and everybody's feeling it.

Who can blame them? It's Pac-Man's most incredible adventure yet — with over 20 treacherous levels of Free Roaming landscapes to fight through. And with dozens of new enemies lurking around, Pac-Land isn't just a Ghost town anymore. But no worries. Using a few old tricks — and some new ones — you'll be feeling Pac-Man's influence for a long time to come.

The Man's got talent! He ice skates, inline skates and even pilots a sub!

Great new 3D Pac-Mazes and bonus arcade games!



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Mild Violence

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JOLLY GREEN GIANT

by tarobe kurume

(far left) Assorted photos from the official Japanese Xbox launch at Tsutaya. Can you spot Bill Gates? Well done.

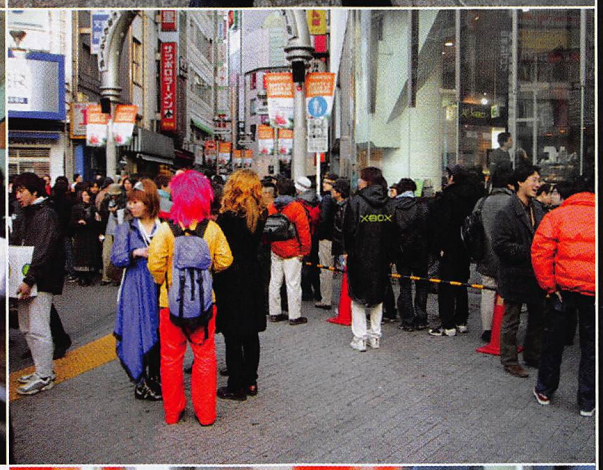
TOKYO - Feb. 22, 2002 — Just three months after the Xbox painted America green, it hit Japan with a mighty *umph* as gamers pondered how to fit the massive boxes (the only way to play *Halo*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Gunvalkyrie*) into their tiny domiciles. The day marked the beginning of Microsoft's pledged long-term commitment to the Japanese market—a wise move given that Japan holds the key to some of today's greatest games. Of the initial 12 games available at launch, two are currently Japan exclusive—*Nobunaga* (ace strategy by Koei) and *Nezmix* (a comic book-style mouse—as in rodent—puzzle action game). *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Halo*, *Genma Onimusha*, *Silent Hill 2*, *DOA3*, *Double S.T.E.A.L.* (*Wreckless*), *Air Force Delta II*, *Project Gotham*, *ESPN Winter X Games*, *Tenku: Freestyle Snowboarding*, and *Hyper Sports 2002* round out the lineup.

"Today's Xbox launch demonstrates our long-term commitment to Japanese video-game players," said Robbie Bach, chief Xbox officer at Microsoft. "Xbox is just getting started in Japan, and already the launch lineup of games is very strong. It's amazing to see what many of the legendary Japanese game designers have been able to accomplish on Xbox."

Hirohisa Ohura, managing director and head of the Xbox Division at Microsoft Japan added, "We are continuing to work with our incredible partners to develop unprecedented games that can only be created on Xbox." In case you're wondering (and we know you are), the systems aren't compatible. But one thing though is for sure: The Japanese Xbox pad destroys ours. We pray Microsoft loaded up the cargo plane for the trip home. Our man on the scene interviewed some happy shoppers on their way home, so check the side bar for some further insight into the festivities. It's apparent that Sega is still a driving force in Japan.

"IT'S AMAZING TO SEE WHAT MANY OF THE LEGENDARY JAPANESE GAME DESIGNERS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH ON XBOX"

-Robbie Bach,
Chief Xbox Officer, Microsoft



We put the following five questions to various Japanese Xbox purchasers on the day of the launch. Their answers may surprise you.

The questions:
1. When did you get in line?
2. What is your initial Impression of Xbox
3. What's the main reason you bought Xbox?
4. What game did you buy with your Xbox?
5. What peripherals did you buy with your Xbox?
6. What do you expect in the future for Xbox?

Customer #1
1. 10:00PM, February 21
2. Big
3. For online gaming; and I'm a Microsoft follower
4. *DOA3*, *Jet Set Radio Future*
5. Extra control pad
6. The development of online games like *PSO*

#2
1. 5:30AM
2. Heavy
3. I believe in the resurrection of SEGA through Xbox
4. *JSRF*
5. A memory card
6. Major titles by third parties

#3
1. 6:00 am
2. Huge
3. The need for challenging games
4. Tenkuu
5. Extra controller
6. Games with concrete content, unlike the PS2

#4
1. 5:00AM
2. Heavy, but satisfactory high spec
3. Unlike PS2, Xbox is Internet ready. I'm interested in online games.
4. *Tenku*
5. Memory
6. Development of online games like *PSO*

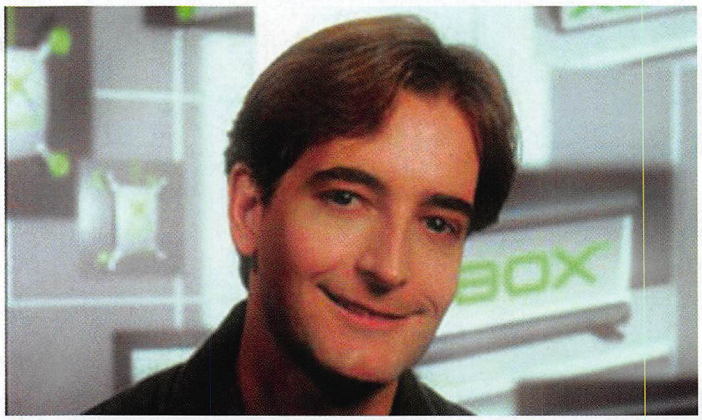
#5
1. 6:00AM
2. Heavy
3. Microsoft follower
4. *JSRF*
5. Extra controller
6. Development of online games like *PSO*; and SEGA titles

#6
1. 6:00AM
2. Heavy. Looks like typical MS console design
3. I'm not interested in online gaming, but believes the console's horsepower will hopefully lead to development of kick-ass titles
4. None (waiting for more titles coming up)
5. None (said, "I will leave it in the box for a month, probably.")
6. I have hope and fear simultaneously

No deaths occured in the trampled frenzy to acquire an Xbox... that we know of.

THE STATE OF THE BOX, PART 2

Ed Fries, Vice President of Microsoft Games Studios, discusses Xbox exlusives, video-game violence, the future of the PC and what exactly Bungie is up to these days—all in the comfort of a Hilton hotel suite during the chaotic Consumer Electronics Show 2001.



What about Xbox exclusives? Are there a lot more games to come?
Certainly everything my group does is an exclusive to Xbox. We've brought out about 10 games right now. Some of the things that are upcoming: *Rally Sport Challenge*, which is a really beautiful game. Have you seen this title at all? [We break for a few rounds of crash-course driving. I'm always tailing at a high-teen position.]

Are you signing up more exclusive studios as time goes on?
Yeah, all the time.

Will your studios come out having names (similar to the branding relationship between Rare and Nintendo)?
I'd like it to be that way. Some of them already have names. I renamed my group to Microsoft Game Studios because I wanted to emphasize that aspect. And certainly, there are well known studios there, like Bungie. But there's also studios that you don't know, like the racing studio, whose name is The Racing Studio. It needs a cooler name. But it's run by a guy named AJ Redmer who's got 15 years of industry experience. He was the co-founder of Maxis, originally. He's put together some amazing games. *Project Gotham Racing* is the number two seller on the Box, after *Halo*. This game is beautiful [pointing to *Rally Sport Challenge*, currently on pause] and we've got several other ones coming out this year.

How do you divide your talent pool?
Basically, my group is divided into 14 different studios. One of them does focus on RPG-like games—that's actually the group that does *Asheron's Call* and they're also coming out with *Dungeon Siege* [both PC titles]. They're also responsible for several Xbox games you haven't seen yet.

Then what demographic are you aiming at next?
16 to 26 was our target for launch. But what we actually found was that we reach broader than that, both high and low. We've done some *really* preliminary studies on who we sold to, and more than ¼ of people we sold to were older than 25. Which is exciting, which means you're reaching out to a broader audience and you're helping to grow the market. [Ed is still fiddling with the Xbox controller, attempting to veer away from guard rails] It's hard to play and talk at the same time. [laughs] So, you're going to see us continue to broaden the age group we're trying to reach, trying to grow the market.

What about tapping into the kid's market?
I don't have a group right now that oversees kid's games. You're gonna see some more games from us that skew younger. But when you say kid's games, I think of it more as educational.

I think we take kids for granted. My nephew is five and he can comprehend many aspects of gaming already—including a complicated control scheme like the Xbox has. The younger generation is only getting smarter by the day.
Yeah, there's some young *Halo* players out there, too. [chuckles] One of the guys in my group has a son named Alex, and I was over his house the other day and he calls his son over—his son's about that age, maybe a little older. He calls him over and says, 'Alex, come here. What game did we play the other day that we can *never* tell Mommy?' The kid looks at me and says, '*Halo*…'

When I was on an airplane during the holidays, there was a kid sitting behind me—maybe 7 or 8—and he was raving about *Grand Theft Auto 3*.
That's maybe where I draw the line. I've got a problem with that.

But kids can tell the difference now.
It does come down to parents, though. We need to educate parents and we need to make sure parents are acting responsibly, otherwise we'll be doomed to always have content that's *just* for kids, because no one will be able to make content that's more appropriate for an older audience just because we'll always be seen as a kid's business. We could fall into the trap, basically, that comic books have fallen into, where comic books in the US got equated to kids. And comic books became *about* kids and their content became restricted because of that. And if you look at that versus, say, what happened to comics to Japan, where it's illustrated reading, basically. What I mean is, actually, on a train in Japan, on a plane to Japan, everyone reads what we might pick up and say, 'Man, look at those comics.' But they're for everyone. And that's what I mean about the video-game business. That's why sometimes I'll say 'interactive entertainment.' And then people go, 'Huh?' I want us to be a mainstream entertainment medium.

Back to Microsoft. How much is Bill Gates involved with Xbox?
He's been a big supporter all along. Obviously, he was involved in some of the additional thinking of the creation of the Box. There were several different paths we were talking about taking. For example, we were looking at doing it earlier—it kind of seems naïve now—we thought we could do it earlier, but with a previous generation of graphics. And Bill looked at it and said, 'No, that's not good enough. I want the

graphics to be at least 2X what's out there.' And that's something that really made us step back and say, 'Okay.' He really pushed us that way to help us make the Box better. He's also been very involved in helping us promote and launch the Box. He's been to two Tokyo Game Shows and he's met with all the major Japanese publishers. He was in New York for the launch. He gave away the first Box. He's a big fan—a big supporter of it. But he's got a big company to run, too. He came through and toured Bungie not too long ago, met all the guys on the team, looked at what they were working on.

Halo 2?

You want the world scoop? No, I can't talk about such a game in existence. [Smirks devilishly] The Bungie team, in general—it's a really fun time for them right now. They've shipped a successful game and they can just afford to spend some time brainstorming, just thinking about what they could do for the future, what kinds of new and innovative ideas could they make. Then, at some point, that will derive down to a schedule, and it will on track to be a project. But right now, we want it to be more freeform than that.

So will console gaming ever become Microsoft's core business?
I don't think so. We have a big and very successful PC gaming group. We have about 10% of the worldwide PC gaming business. That's a very profitable business for us—it's a great business—and we want to grow it even further. From a business point of view, it doesn't make sense for us to walk away from that. But from a learning point of view, in a lot of ways, I see things happen first on the PC. If we can translate those ideas into the console world, we can make console games better. I see the PC as a place where there's a lot of innovation happening and I wanted to tap into that.

Though, some people argue that the Xbox is essentially a set-top PC.
I actually think Xbox does blur the lines. There were so many wacky comments when we were putting Xbox together. People saying stuff like, '*Halo* can never succeed because the color palette is *so* PC. You need more bright colors—more Mario oranges and blues. That's the console world.' No, it's not. That's what the console world was.

Honestly, were you a little uneasy after E3 2001?
I'd say on the development side, which is my side, we always knew what we were building. I have a huge amount of confidence in the Bungie team. If you asked me a year-and-a-half ago what's the killer title gonna be for launch, I'd say *Halo*. If you asked me a year ago, I'd say *Halo*. Six months ago, I'd say *Halo*. At launch, I'd say *Halo*. Now I say, 'See, it was *Halo*.' That never changed. At the same time, one of the problems when you're building something—at least if you know what your doing—you see the *finished* product when you look at the *unfinished* product.

Do you think the Xbox showing at E3 was premature, but since it was E3—the ultimate showcase for video-games—you were forced to arrive with something… anything?
If we could go back and do it differently, would I do it differently? Yes, I would. So, in that sense, I agree with you. But did that make me less confident at the time. No, it didn't. We showed what we could show at that time, but in our minds we saw were it was going to be. Does that make sense?

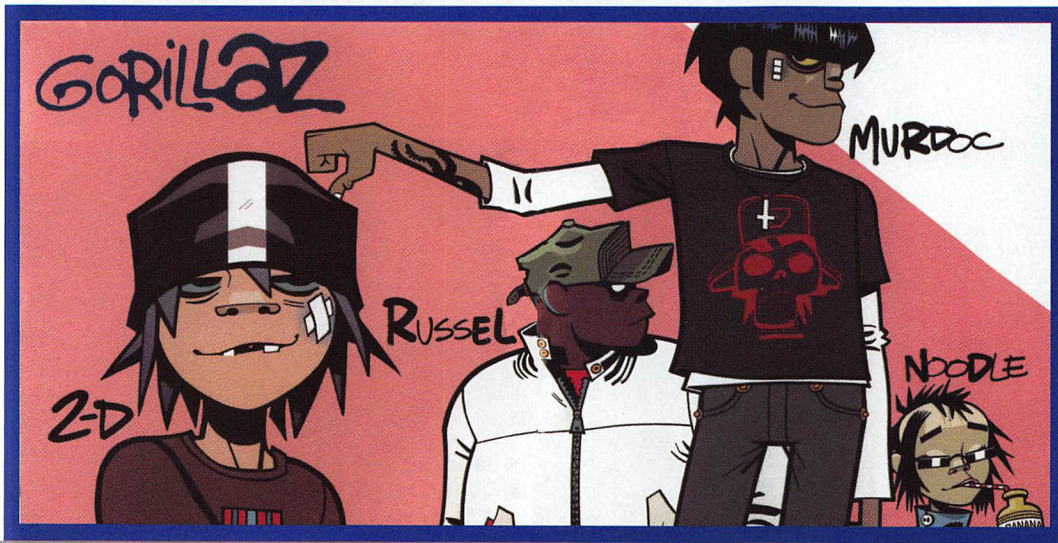
But the general public's reaction wasn't positive by any means.
Well, the general public isn't used to seeing something that's half done, and extrapolating that to what it's going to look like when it's done. And certainly, we need to get more savvy about showing things well—showing things in a way that people can see the final result that we have in our minds is. And I think we learned some things about that. I also think that there's a little bit of a magnifying effect by the press. What makes it a story is that 'this was terrible' or 'this was great,' right? Things get pushed to the poles. In a way, you have this thing that, in my mind, was good and got better. Where the story becomes, 'Oh, it was terrible.' And then, all of a sudden, 'Where did it come from? It was awesome!' Well, it was the same thing all along.

"WE NEED TO EDUCATE PARENTS AND MAKE SURE [THEY ACT] RESPONSIBLY, OTHERWISE WE'LL BE DOOMED TO ALWAYS HAVE CONTENT THAT'S *JUST* FOR KIDS..."

What about a mascot, Ed?
I'll say two things. One: We have some very interesting character games in development. Certainly the work that Tim Schaffer is doing, the creator of *Full Throttle*. He's somebody who really understands characters. We've got games that have some really great characters. So you're going to see those games, and you can decide whether that character represents the platform. Fine. To me, that thinking is along the same lines as the 'constant color palette' thing. I think, actually, all games need great characters—that character is just part of having a story and actually caring about what's happening. So, to me, I think in the future, you're not going to see platforms defined by a character.

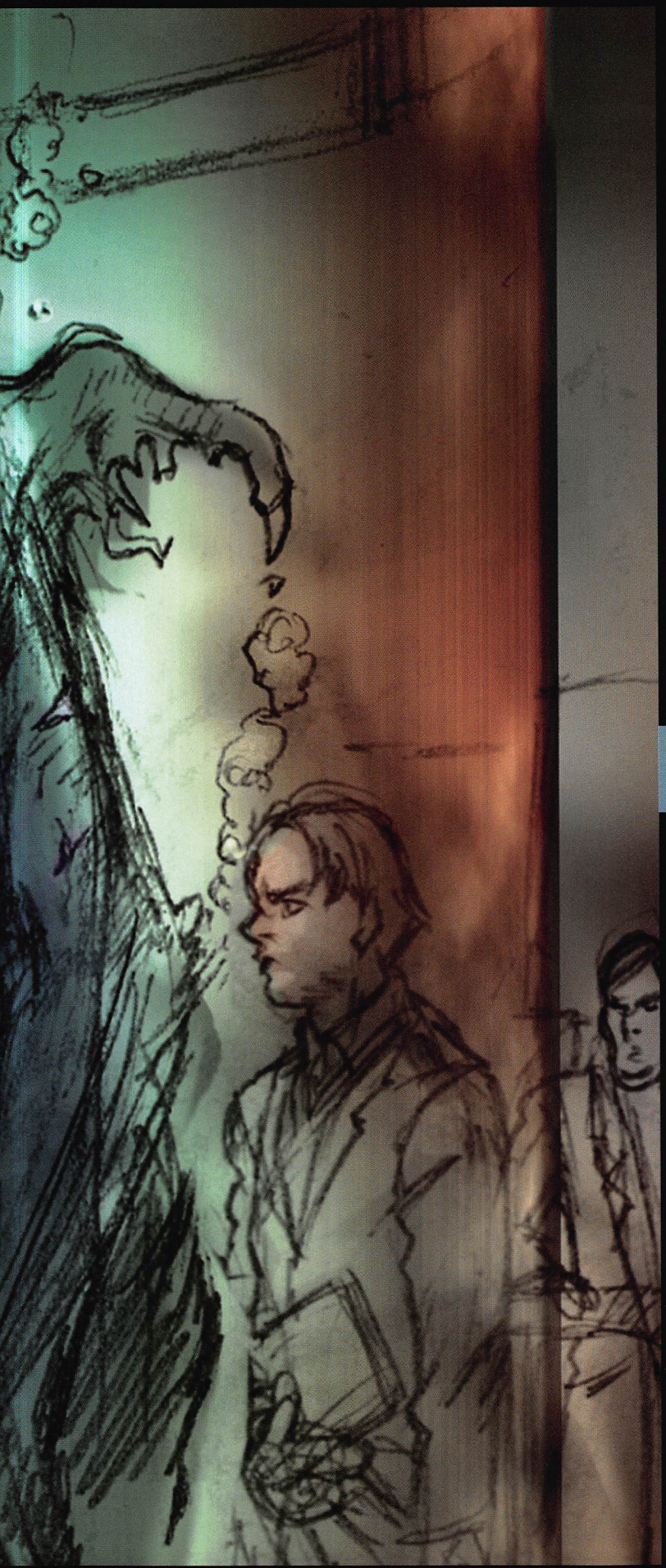
It's just like movies. There is no one actor that defines the film industry.
In a way, it's the maturing of the industry—the industry needs to mature in the same way as the film industry, to take you analogy. There actually were actors in the 40s and 50s under studio contract. They had contracts on these actors that *did* represent the studios in films. I think that business matured; and, in some ways, where going through similar maturing.

And, finally, when's the Japanese controller going to hit US shores? This domestic version just isn't as comfortable as the smaller, overseas version.
[Smiles decidedly] We haven't announced we're doing that yet.



MONKEY BUSINESS

Everyone's favorite Manga-inspired toons, those crazy Gorillaz (their debut album stands at 4 million sold and counting), are partnering with Static 2358 to develop *Zombie Kong*, an interactive TV game bringing us ever close to a Gorillaz video-game! Featuring all four members—Murdoc, Noodle, 2D and Russel—the show, which debuted in the UK, Friday Feb. 12th, on the Playjam channel, allows viewers to use their remote controls to guide Noodle through 12 levels. High score winners will be eligible for all sorts of monkey business, like backstage passes and select merchandise. Gorillaz creators Damon Albarn (lead singer of Blur) and *Tank Girl* artist Jamie Hewlett have let on that there is a feature film in the Gorillaz' future; and their next album will reportedly be a movie soundtrack. Hmmm, I wonder which movie?



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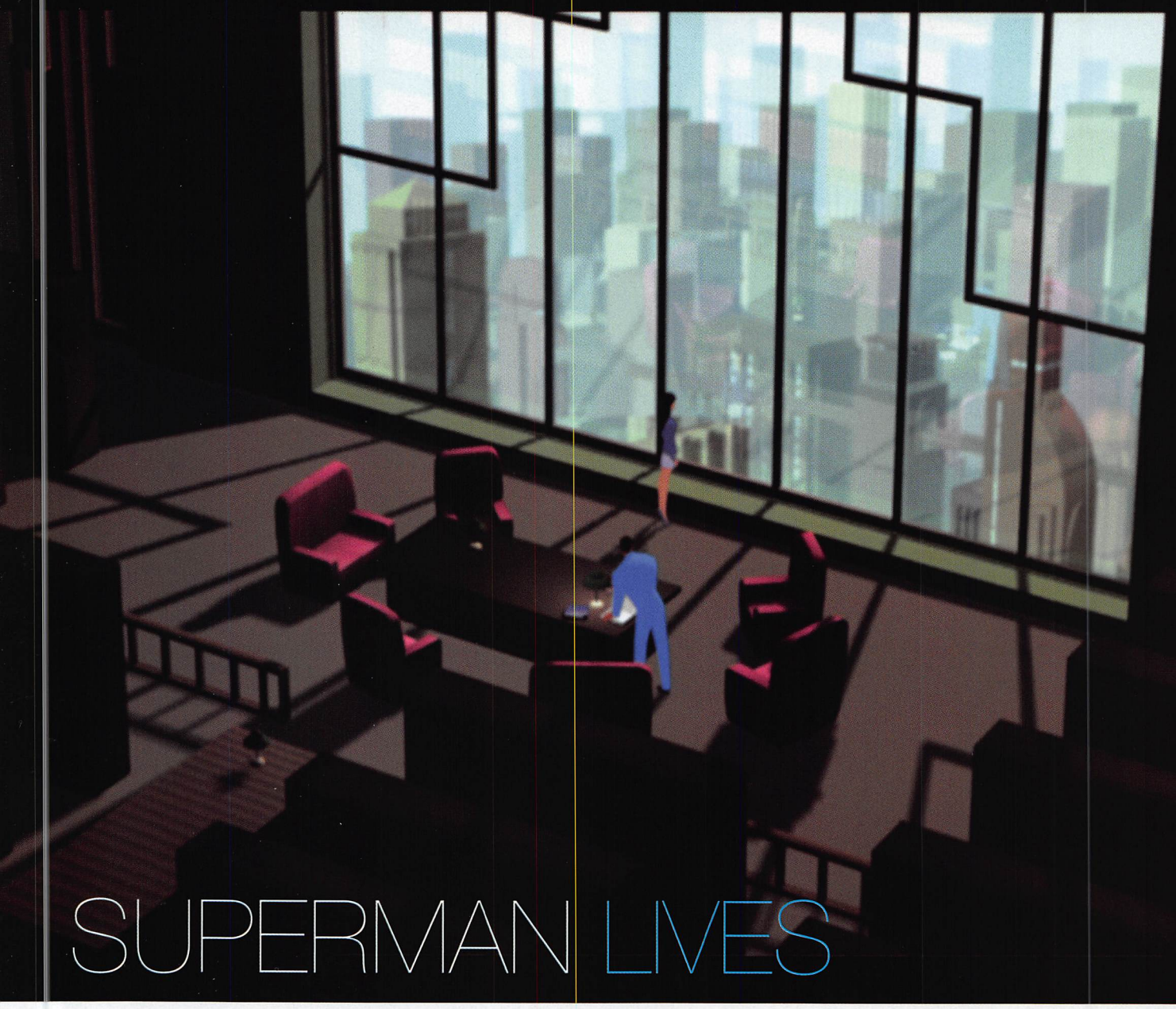


SUPERMAN LIVES

Being the rebirth of The Man of Steel on a planet called PlayStation 2. Fueled by next-gen specs and voice-acting to match, you'll think you're *actually* playing the animated series.

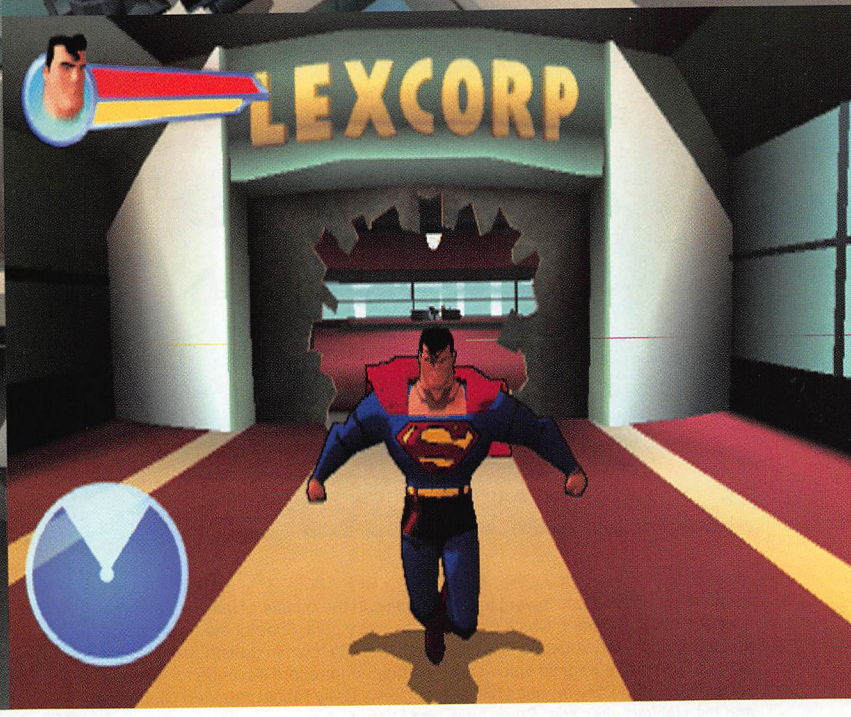
story by **jon m gibson**

The moment your eyes fix on the "S" embroidered on his spandex action suit, the name registers. He is an icon the world over, from New York to Tokyo to Sydney to Spain. His face has been spread across comics and merchandise since the late 1930s. In other words, Superman is a name you know.

Unfortunately, The Man of Steel hasn't had it so easy making the transition to video games. Initially, the very mention of that "other" game sends chills down our spine, conjuring visions of the N64 game that, although it sold extremely well, fell short in every facet of gameplay. That "S" had started to stand for something else—and many thought the Superman franchise had reached a point of no return.

Now, after spending several years on the backburner, the interactive legacy of Superman is finally getting a major push in the right direction. Thank Infogrames, vanguards of video-game licensing (currently working overtime on The Terminator, Loony Tunes and Godzilla franchises), for resusitating the brand. By enlisting the aid of Sheffield House (*Loaded*), a subsidiary developer based in England, The Strongest Man in the World has risen from the digital rubble that was once thought to be his grave.

"One thing we tried to do from the outset was not constrain or withhold what a player can do," explains Paul Porter, Studio Manager at Sheffield. Nearly everyone involved with *Superman: Shadow of Apokolips* tends to quiver whenever that "other" Superman game is mentioned in conversation—actually, many shutter at even an inkling of similarity—so they aggressively deflect any comparisons. "Your powers are available from the start, the environments are totally interactive, you can pick up whatever objects you want, you can combat whoever's there. It's not a game that's contrived or leads you down a single track."



"ONE THING WE TRIED TO DO FROM THE OUTSET WAS NOT CONSTRAIN OR WITHHOLD WHAT A PLAYER CAN DO."

Luckily, all the building blocks are sliding into place perfectly. The subject matter alone—the animated adventures of Superman, seen regularly on Kids' WB—benefits greatly from a next-gen spin: cartoons have finally reached the interactive stage. Instead of being the passive observer once every Saturday morning, you can now become the aggressive, dominating superhero. The programmers at Sheffield, a dedicated team that has studied the Superman brand through several mediums (TV, comic book, and film), have captured the true essence of the animated series. Porter expounds: "It's a slightly different technique than we used for *Wacky Races*. It is actually textured—if you look closely—but the shading is colored into the texture, whereas the characters are cel-shaded. It does help the characters to stand out."

"It's predominantly a third-person perspective game—an action adventure game—and action is the main focus," Rob Smith, Senior Producer, illustrates. "There are 15 large-scale levels, and as you can see, they are cartoon style. All the characters and objects within the game are cartoon-lit, so we've actually taken the animated series to heart." As you fly through Metropolis, for instance, Superman's red cape flows wildly as if you really are soaring at the speed of a bullet, or it simply flutters as you glide casually throughout the skies. Turn left and the cape reacts—as does Superman's body. His torso flexes; his arms, legs and head shift—and the in-game camera follows the action smoothly, as if it were tethered to our hero. The smallest details were tended to when animating The Man of Steel—like a real-time shadow that is cast wherever Superman flies, which is just one of many elements that bring the cartoon to life.

Smith recites another example of Sheffield's dedication to make *Shadow of Apokolips*

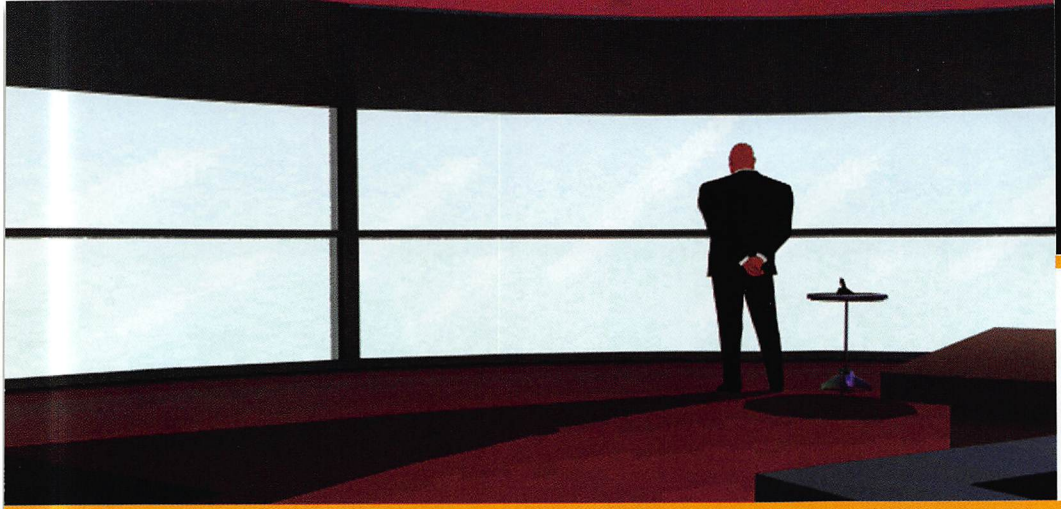
"ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE ANIMATED SERIES IS THAT THEY REALLY WENT TO TOWN IN GETTING GREAT HOLLYWOOD TALENT."

a watertight adaptation: "I went to Los Angeles in the middle of January and met a lot of Hollywood stars, which was actually pretty cool. One of the great things about the animated series is that they really went to town in getting great Hollywood talent." The entire original voice cast was tapped to record dialogue for the game's cut scenes. Tim Daly reprises his role as geeky Daily Planet reporter, Clark Kent, and his stalwart alter ego, Superman; and Dana Delaney plays the lovely Lois Lane. Clancy Brown (Lex Luthor), Malcolm McDowell (Metallo), Lori Petty (Livewire), Michael Ironside (Darkseid), David Kaufman (Jimmy Olsen), and Michael York (Kanto) round out the roster of celebrity talent. But without a compelling script, what would big name voices be? Just murmurs in a microphone.

"The game is heavily plot and character driven," Smith continues. "We've worked for a long, long time with DC Comics and Warner Bros. on plot and character design and how they can work within the game." Wherein, Lex Luthor, the root of all evil in most Superman yarns—a force that generally dominates Metropolis—becomes the unassuming pawn of Darkseid and Kanto. With the help of his more powerful, untrustworthy allies, Luthor is given access to technology allowing him to manufacture hordes of Inter-bots and extremely deadly Apokolips weaponry. Thus, Luthor begins kidnapping the top scientific minds in Metropolis to help him reverse-engineer the Apokolips arms, then continues his devious plan by breaking Metallo out of Strykers Island Prison as a tool to destroy Superman (too bad Luther is to blame for John Curbin's transformation into the hideous metallic state). Livewire, a super-villain of pure electricity, and Parasite, who drains energy from foes, quickly factor into the overall mess of things. "Four to five months went into the development of the plot to make sure there weren't any holes," Smith reveals, content that the plot will quench everyone's thirst. And frankly, he's confident that it's spot-on to watching an episode of the series unfold (just much longer, of course).

So there's no question Superman will have plenty of adversity to subdue, but interactivity is key to making *Shadow of Apokolips* a success. "All of Superman's abilities are available to the player—every single last one," Smith revels, excited by his team's achievement. "There are no pick-ups. This is a Superman game. The player is expecting to play as Superman. They're expecting the powers. They're going to get them." That includes telescopic heat and x-ray vision (used, respectively, to explode enemies and find hidden items by peering into buildings and behind walls), super hearing (to catch wind of desperate civilian cries for help), and power drops (a cool, powerful maneuver that allows you to plummet from mid-flight onto the ground to create a brutal shockwave, knocking enemies about over 360 degrees). "You can find one power that you'll really enjoy—like the eye blast," Porter adds eagerly. "Different people will find different powers. It's like a big toy box. It's just fun to pick things up, throw them about, heat things up, cool them down, burn things." In addition, super strength and speed dashes can be used to solve puzzle elements installed within each level, ranging from simple, time-based quickies (like running in-between laser beams) to somewhat more integral acts (like plugging poisonous gas leaks in ground vents by lifting large pillars).

Centrally, though, combat is a huge focus of gameplay. "You will ultimately be fighting against characters that are robotic," Smith says excitedly. "The nice thing about these Inter-bot characters is that they separate—they blow up—when you hit them with punches or your heat ray. We've got a particle effect engine as well,



"AS YOU FLY THROUGH METROPOLIS, SUPERMAN'S RED CAPE FLOWS WILDLY AS IF YOU'RE REALLY SOARING AT THE SPEED OF A BULLET."

into each level, resulting in a much-welcomed variety of options that asks players to multi-task. While evading Inter-bots—intelligent, quick-thinking A.I. that will duck and dodge your punches—you'll also have to save several Metropolis residents caught in a burning skyscraper or attempt to mend the cracked city dam using your arms of steel. During one stage, within Lex Corp Labs, players actually take control of Clark Kent as well. Here, super powers will be inaccessible; you'll have to rely on stealth to complete the mission.

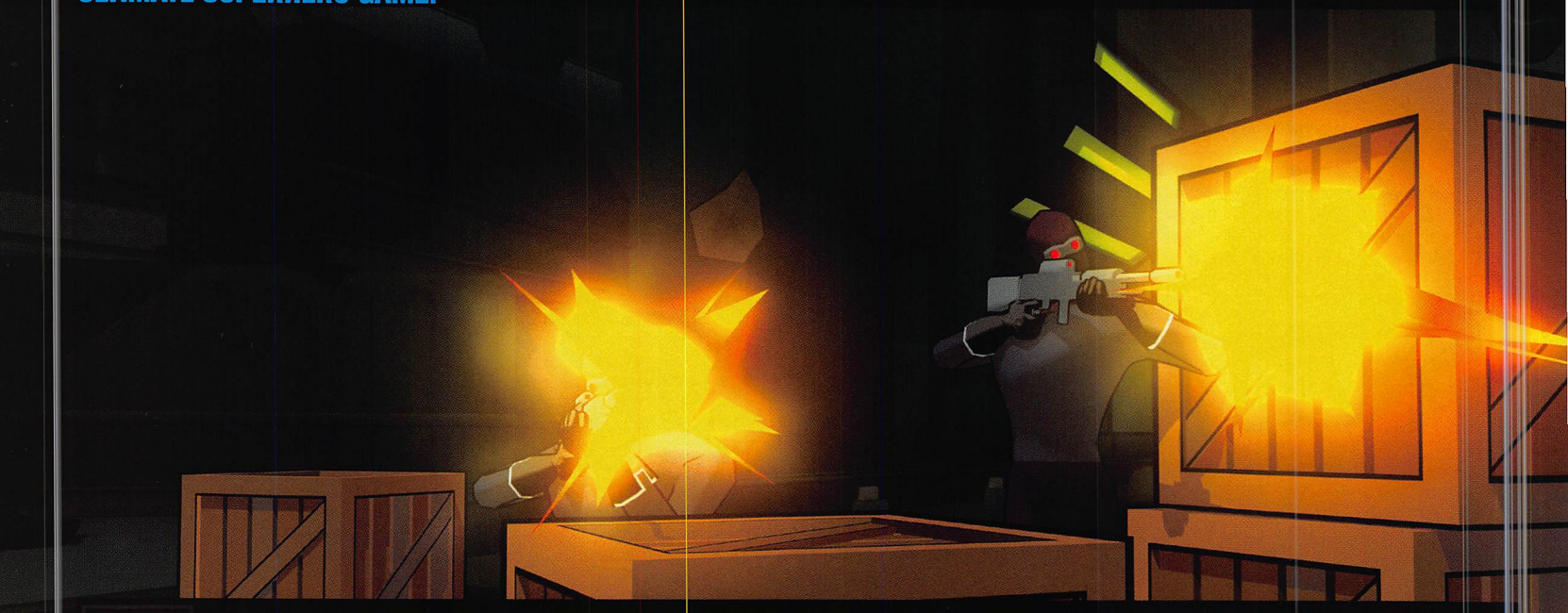
Plus, there is no single way to navigate each level; players are given the choice to wander—to let curiosity take over—and discover each environment with complete freedom. In fact, flying around the deceivingly large Metropolis—a city that incorporates long, connecting walkways between each building—it's actually possible to soar from the base to the very tip of the Daily Planet's headquarters, locked in at a swift 60 frames per second. And even though the version of *Shadow of Apokolips* that we played was extremely early in development, Sheffield House promises that the city will be infinitely populated, charged with hundreds of pedestrians and moving vehicles. Cars will obey traffic laws and deform when Superman throws them about, and each animated character will live their digital lives like average, digital people. With a superior attention to detail, the developers have created a universe in which Superman fans will thrilled. Not to mention anyone who loves a great action-adventure.

But even the man synonymous with the legendary phrase "It's a bird, it's a plane…" can't argue that bombarding buildings in a blazing metropolis has taken on a new complexion. Battling super-villains in a landscape as ripe as Metropolis is a powerful scenario, but the game would have been even more epic if buildings could receive the same damage vehicles can if Superman were to, say, throw an Inter-bot into the edge of Lex Corp. "There's two issues, really," Smith says. "First, there's the technical issue. We felt that really reinforcing the superpowers themselves—the way they work and the gameplay—was more important than modifying the environment. The second issue was September 11. So damaging buildings was something we didn't want to do. Bearing in mind, DC Comics is based in New York, so it was a very sensitive issue."

A development crew of over 30 talented programmers, artists and engineers toiling away for two years is certainly evident, but there is still nearly six months of fine-tuning ahead before this latest Superman adventure goes gold. The in-game music has yet to receive orchestral treatment and many of the villains weren't at a proper stage to show to the media. But DC Comics and Warner Bros. have been watching over every step to insure perfection. "There is an approval process we go through, but it's immensely enjoyable because of the amount of skills the team has," Porter construes. "For instance, the cut-scene development that we've done. We submitted a series of storyboards for the cut scenes, and we got back artwork they improved upon. Now the guys have loads of DC Comics artwork downstairs. It's a very enjoyable relationship. You have to be careful what you do with the character—[Superman is] their character. [He has] been around a long time. You can't just change him." Rest assured: *Shadow of Apokolips* promises to convey the spectacle of Bruce Timm's animation by every degree.

"We believe a man can fly, because you can do everything that you expect Superman to do—and that's our main point," Smith concludes, smiling. "We want to make a game that does this character justice. He's been around for 65 years. We think this is going to be the ultimate superhero game."

"WE WANT TO MAKE A GAME THAT DOES [SUPERMAN] JUSTICE. HE'S BEEN AROUND FOR 65 YEARS. WE THINK THIS IS GOING TO BE THE ULTIMATE SUPERHERO GAME."



PS2

SUPERMAN: SHADOW OF APOKOLIPS

preview

developer: sheffield house publisher: infogrames available: fall

Simply judging from the in-game cinemas and screenshots shown throughout this feature (there is no pre-rendered artwork here), Sheffield House definitely knows their source material.

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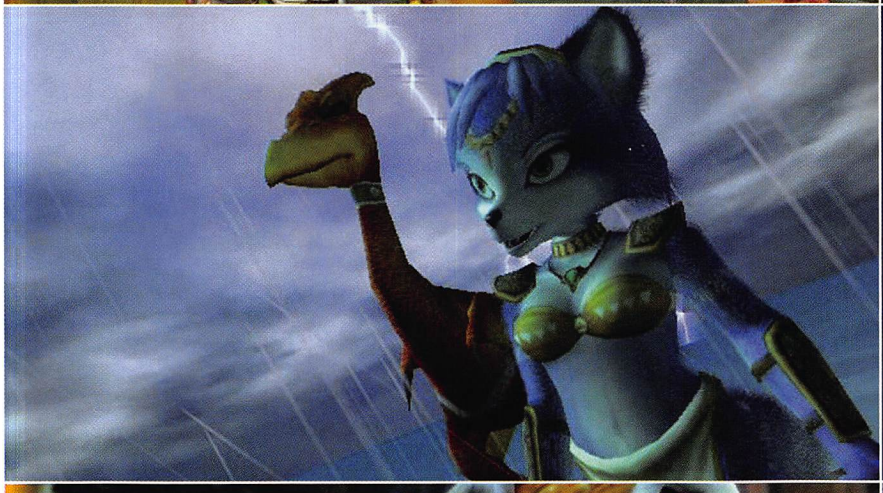
21st CENTURY FOX

Iconic characters deserve epic games, and it looks like Fox McCloud is getting the treatment he, and we, deserve

Quick history: the latest in the classic Starfox series essentially began its interesting journey on Nintendo 64 a few years ago as *Dinosaur Planet*, made a formidable appearance at E3 2000, dropped off the industry radar, reemerged on the GameCube at last year's E3 with a new name and Fox McCloud as the main character and a promising but far from spectacular new look, soon received an injection of some serious Rare juice, and now exists in its near final form: a game that looks to spill over with incredible imagination and soaring adventure. And Fox has fur — the kind of fur that is delicate, softly textured and

The world comes alive with beatifully rich color, lighting and texture.



Fox will find a lady friend to aid in his journey

individually stranded, dynamically affected by Fox's movements. It would appear that we're getting to a point where, if a character is a fox, he has fur like a fox.

Fox, his faithful triceratops Prince Tricky and his sidekicks Slippy (weapons expert), Peppy (navigator) and Rob the Robot (supplier) are indeed our latest technical wonders, and the world they inhabit is equally impressive. An enormous, richly organic place loaded with dense foliage, massive, exotic creatures — some, like the dinosaurs roaming the land, towering hundreds of feet above the indomitable Fox — and all sorts of gorgeously rendered structures and machinery. A wonderfully captivating mood is instantly established; I can only imagine what the complete adventure holds .

With the invaluable aid of his many friends, including the newest female ally Krystal, Fox battles through air—can't wait to pilot the Arwing once again—water and sea, blasting and running and puzzle-solving his way to the less-than-humble abode of the tyrannical General Scales, who has decided that the world would be better served under his ruthless command. It's all coming together marvelously: As a colleague of mine said, "Looks like my GameCube finally becomes a Nintendo product."

BRADY FIECHTER

"A WONDERFULLY CAPTIVATING MOOD IS IMMEDIATELY ESTABLISHED; I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT THE FINAL ADVENTURE WILL HOLD"

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

STARFOX ADVENTURES | preview

developer: rare | publisher: nintendo | available: june 10

The GameCube yearns for such an adventure as Starfox. Rare does not know the idea of restraint, which is exactly the way we like it.

THE FALL GUY

Reflections' *Stuntman* puts players in the driver's seat—but this time, you're working for Tinseltown

Your gameplay options are plentiful: Either take the wheel on set of a Hollywood blockbuster or engage in demolition at a stunt park.

The headlines are bold: "Gamer incapacitated while attempting to reenact a scene from a movie." It's a grim reality—stupid kids jump off five-story buildings and set themselves on fire because it "looked cool" on TV. Finally, someone has translated that into a completely safe, 100% childproof interactive experience.

"While we were still working on *Driver 2* on the PSone, the obvious choice was to do *Driver 3* on the PS2," says Martin Edmonson, Managing Development Director at Reflections, undoubtedly excited. "But we wanted to do something completely different. So we came up with *Stuntman*, where you play the part of a Hollywood stuntman working on six different movies."

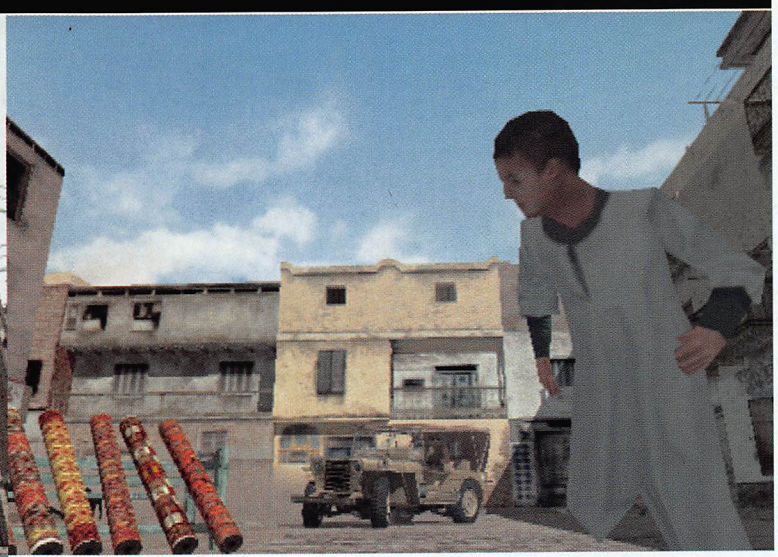
But rather than jump into the utter insanity of a third-person actionier (wherein you might kickbox your way to a paycheck on-set of the latest Van-Damme flick), Reflections adopted to use the technology developed for the *Driver* series and incorporate that into a stunt vehicle physics engine.

"The handling is very similar to *Driver*," Edmonson continues. "*Stuntman* has the same pick-up-and-play mechanics with a heavy emphasis on physics and simulation. We have taken everything into consideration, including rocking suspensions, center of gravity, and coefficient of friction. We want the player to *really* feel the car on the environment that he's driving on."

Also, instead of the generally tame cars in the previous *Driver* games, *Stuntman* features an array of full-throttle alternatives: open-top jeeps, revved-up corvettes, monster trucks, snowmobiles, and even a tuk tuk. Your gig: perform whatever death-defying antic your director demands on one of six different film sets. The scripts include: *Toothless in Wapping*, a Guy Ritchie-style gangster romp through the heart of London; *A Whoopin' and a Hollarin'*, a *Dukes of Hazard*-inspired crash course; *Blood Oath*, a distinctly John Woo Asian action film; *Conspiracy*, a political thriller in the same vein of the Jack Ryan series; *The Scarab of Lost Souls*, obviously a trip through Egypt a` la an Indiana Jones' adventure; and *Live Twice for Tomorrow*, the obligatory James Bond epic. Reflections has done an amazing job crafting the look and sound of the individual motion pictures—from the Hollywood scores to the scenic locations, every set has a diverse personality.

Each on-set job offers a variety of stunt driving, becoming progressively more difficult as you wrap each production, too. *Toothless in Wapping*, for instance, simply has you careening through the thin alleyways and skinny streets of England, hopping ramps and

"IN *STUNTMAN*, YOU CAN REDUCE THE BODY OF YOUR CAR TO MERE SHARDS—SO OFTENTIMES, IT'S FUN TO JUST DRIVE AROUND AND CRASH."



knocking about barrels. *Blood Oath*, however, has you speeding across rooftops, hitting very precise jumps while avoiding incoming missile fire from enemy helicopters. And in *Live Twice for Tomorrow*, you're plopped in the middle of a cliffside chase, requiring you to weave in and out of traffic while pursuing the assailant (one of the most difficult stunts in the game). A voice-over director stands by during each cut, guiding you through the shot that he is determined to capture on celluloid—so it's a matter of gliding across all the correct marks, whether that means ramming your car through a storefront or laying it to rest at the bottom of a murky riverfront. Then you're scored on accuracy; either you graduate to a bigger-budget picture or you're sent to the stuntman retirement home.

Reflections has even installed an intricate volumetric shadowing system (offering proper, real-world lighting effects) and, as an extremely pleasurable bonus, the damage tally in *Stuntman* is shocking. Everything from a miniscule headlamp to the entire driver-side door can be demolished while the game is in action (a engaging feature, considering most racing titles of late incorporate licensed vehicles, nullifying any chance of making even a dent). In *Stuntman*, however, you can reduce the body of your car to mere shards—so oftentimes, it's fun to just drive around and crash.

It all comes together as a very refreshing feat, proving that the racing genre still has many original forks in the road to veer onto, whether it's *the Grand Theft Auto* route or something surprisingly engaging like *Stuntman*.

JON M GIBSON

PS2

STUNTMAN | preview

developer: reflections publisher: infogrames available: summer

Considering Reflections has plenty of experience with *Driver* and *Driver 2* on their mantle, *Stuntman* will undoubtedly be physics-friendly—and it promises loads of excitement, too.

"the team behind the wheel is Reflections, the folks who brought you the addictive and challenging Driver, so you can count on it being full of huge crashes, out of control power slides, and deadly near misses. Sounds like a recipe for some awesome vehicular carnage." – *IGN.com*

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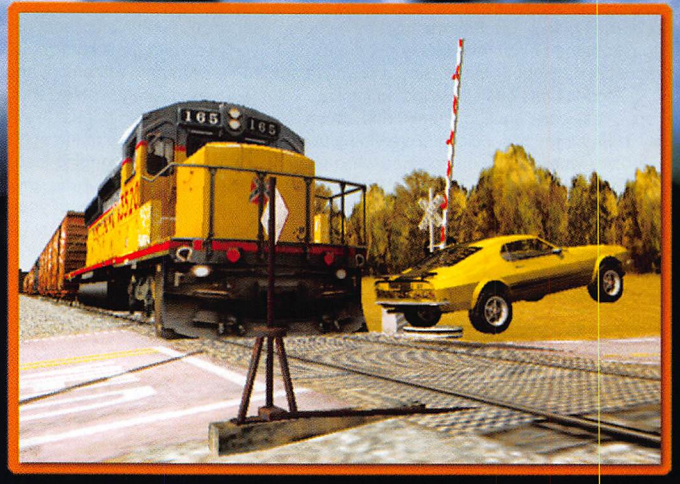

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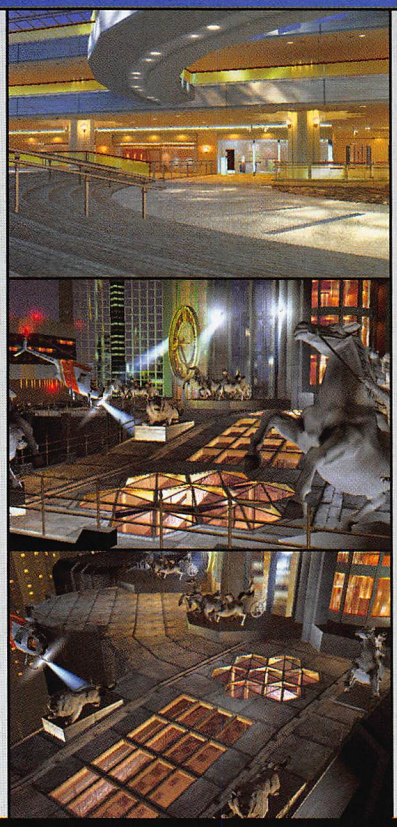
TALKIN' TEKKEN

If looking to your immediate right makes you as happy as it does us, read on...

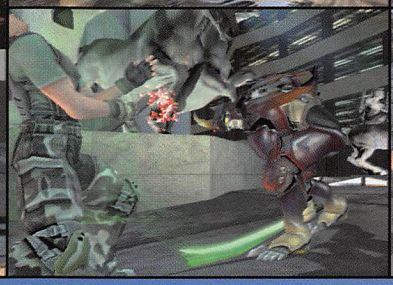
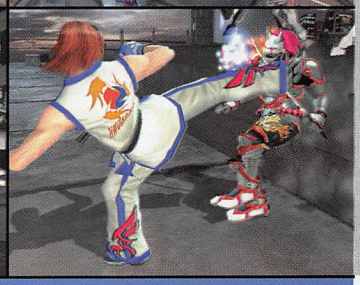
All the images loading these pages are from the PlayStation 2 *Tekken 4*, slickly stylized and wholly impressive, but seeing the game move will, of course, be the true test of just how far Namco has taken *Tekken 4* past its arcade counterpart—the test I've unfortunately yet to take, leaving my opinion fueled solely by the extensive time I've spent with the arcade version.

Early verdict: *Tekken 4* is my favorite *Tekken* because it polishes what was already my favorite 3D fighting series, and extras for the home, like hidden options, characters and rendered endings—Namco's mum on the bigger details—can only enhance the enjoyment of an already killer fighter.

Now for a few questions: is the strongest aspect of *Tekken 4*'s appeal a freshly engaging fighting system, or is this essentially pure *Tekken* with a visual makeover that demands newfound play? And is the addition of closed environments that can be used to corner an opponent a dynamic addition? Does the full 3D movement impact



Namco looks to have have outdone themselves (which isn't easy to do), bringing *Tekken 4* to the PS2

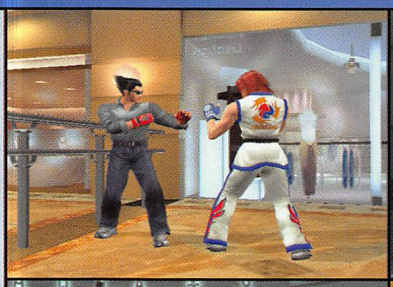



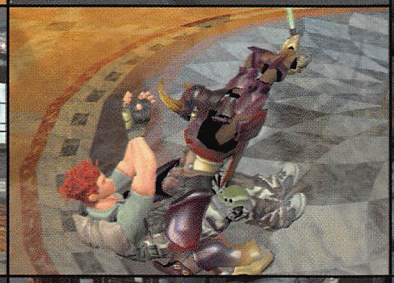
the feel and play of the game? Is *Tekken 4* really all that much of a departure from *Tekken Tag Tournament*—or even *Tekken 3*—to demand your interest? Answers depend on your history with the series and desire to plug into the broadest intricacies of the fighting system. When I play *Tekken 4*, I find myself commanding that same deliberate, staccato exchange of acrobatic punches and kicks and slams that Law and Jun have been delivering since the beginning, simply enjoying the evolving look; and then I see the most skilled, fastidious players opening their fighting approach to a new level, revealing new moves and relying skillfully on 3D movement and consistently smashing cornered opponents into walls.

Namco does not disappoint with its arcade ports—just look at the extraordinary *Soul Calibur*—taking uncommon care in giving us more than we are used to expecting. Indeed, with *Virtua Fighter 4* and Namco's own *Soul Calibur 2* providing the looming competition, not to mention the formidable *Dead or Alive 3* standing tall on Xbox, *Tekken 4* better pack a powerful punch.

BRADY FIECHTER

"AN ALREADY AMAZING SEQUEL GETS THE ROYAL TREATMENT IN ITS TRANSITION TO THE PS2"





Tekken 4 art overleaf ▮

PS2

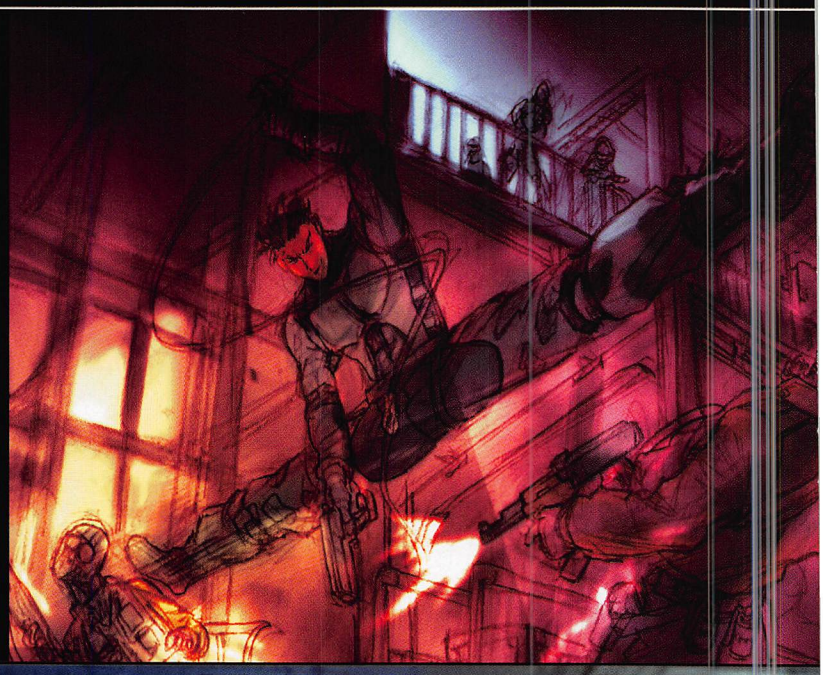
TEKKEN 4

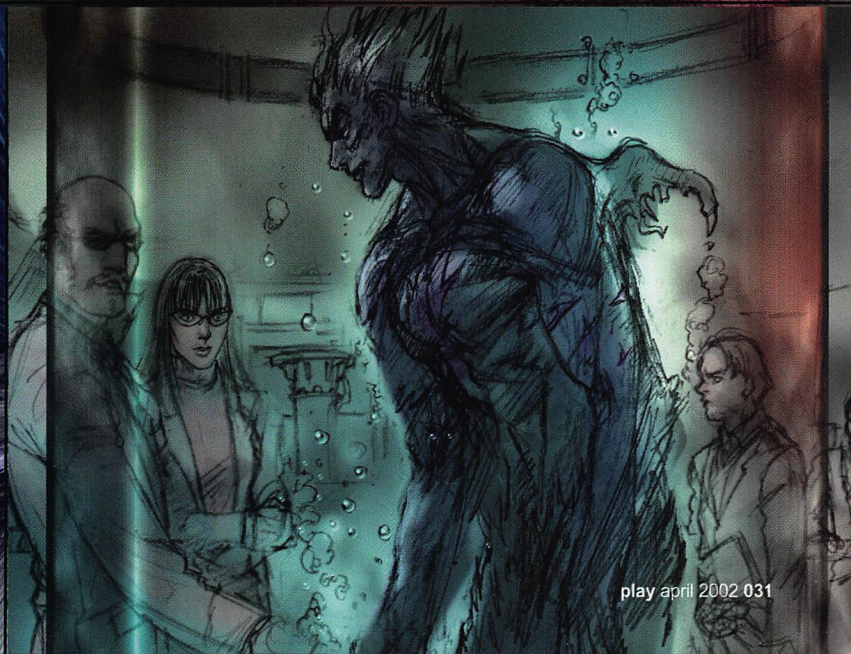
preview

developer: namco publisher: namco available: summer

With the introduction of *Tekken 4* post *Virtua Fighter 4*, the PS2 is finally amassing a formidable fighting arsenal.

tekken 4
art gallery





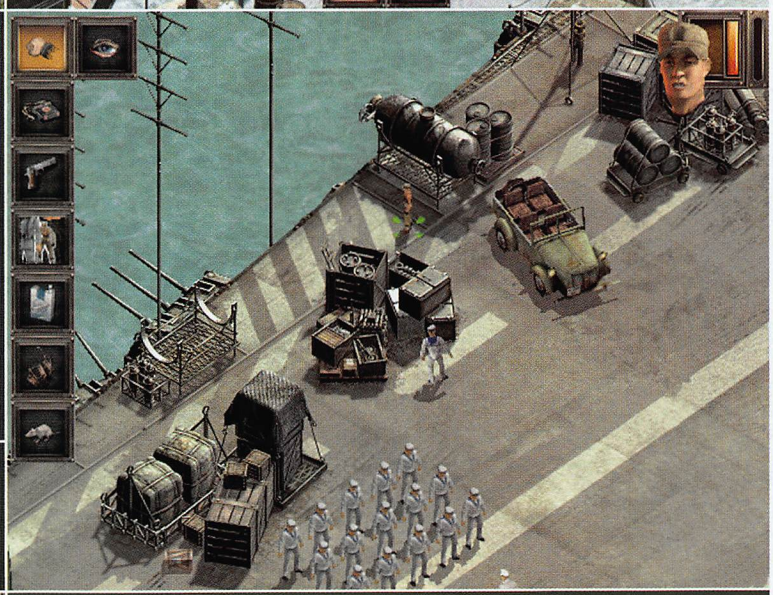
THIS IS MY RIFLE

On your feet, soldier! Eidos is preparing to blow us away with the haunting images of war

The greatest horrors of reality tend to inspire the most compelling fiction. War, for example, is often a tremendously successful creative canvas in Hollywood (the thrilling *Black Hawk Down* deserves its Oscar nod), but it rarely provides a backdrop for game design. I find this unfortunate. There is something intrinsically powerful about experiencing fantasy layered in real-world references. The finest example of this, I believe, is the uncommonly affecting *Medal of Honor* series (the sequel looks extraordinary; see pg 34-35), which drops us into the chaos of World War II.

Another game to draw from the poignancy of the second world war is *Commandos 2*, an overhead action adventure that depicts actual environments and even scenes from classic WWII movies. Its exquisitely detailed settings and richly authentic feel are immediately captivating, but *Commandos 2* does not intend to end with impressive presentation. Excitedly emphasizing their fastidious attention to the deeper details of gameplay, Pyro Studios walked us through some of the more intricate elements in the game, constantly focusing on how important it is to them to replicate the conditions of war – and not just from a visceral action standpoint. All sorts of objects can be interacted with on some level: swing from cables, drive captured vehicles, enter buildings, steal weapons and uniforms.

"ITS EXQUISITELY DETAILED SETTINGS AND RICHLY AUTHENTIC FEEL ARE IMMEDIATELY CAPTIVATING"



Feast on the extraordinary level of detail

As a sergeant of the Allied forces, Jack "Butcher" O'Hara commands a small army in the heart of such locations as France, Thailand and Normandy. The ten areas have been patterned after actual WWII environments, and the result is quite striking in its realism. Because I haven't had the chance to dig deeply into the game, I'm most anxious to see how skillfully Pyro Studios succeeds at replicating dynamic physics on the characters and environmental objects—an accomplishment that will greatly enhance the ambience of the game (see the remarkable Halo).

I've been waiting for this one for far too long. *Medal of Honor* deserves strong company.

BRADY FIECHTER

XBOX PS2

COMMANDOS 2 | preview

developer: pyro studios publisher: eidos available: june

Admittedly, I'm extremely enthusiastic about the potential of Commandos 2 for its theme alone. Medal of Honor needs some strong company.

BEACHFRONT PROPERTY

The next-gen console marries the ultimate WWII franchise, *Medal of Honor*—and the union is long and prosperous

With the recent popularity of movies such as *Saving Private Ryan*, television shows like *Band of Brothers* and the resurgence of swing and big band music into the mainstream, it's no wonder that WWII is a hot commodity. We can even go so far as saying that history is kinda hip. And as one would expect, the ever-changing gaming industry had recognized this and have released games centered on this era.

One series that received critical success was of course DreamWorks Interactive's *Medal of Honor* series. Inspired by Steven Spielberg, *Medal of Honor* was the first WWII-themed action-adventure for the PlayStation. It combined suspenseful gameplay with in-depth missions, authentic sound effects and a brilliant musical score to create a truly immersive experience.

For those of you unfamiliar, *Medal of Honor* put players in the role of an agent in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the United States' wartime spy and covert operations agency, who aids the Allied Forces in an effort to thwart the German takeover of Europe. Played from a first-person perspective, players took part in a variety of missions that involved everything from stealth to all-out sabotage. The game was truly brilliant and DreamWorks followed up with a sequel, *Medal of Honor: Underground*, which also appeared on the PlayStation.

Fans of the games who have waited patiently for the series to come to a next generation system can finally revel in front of their PlayStation 2s. Coming this June is *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, an all-new adventure built from the ground up. "Bringing *Medal of Honor* to the PlayStation 2 is extremely exciting," explains Scott Langteau, Producer at EA Los Angeles working on *Frontline*. "With the hardware, we can have better architecture, better lighting, better sound, brand new score and over 900 brand new animations. We now have the capability to really make this a truly compelling experience."

Medal of Honor: Frontline will have over 15 levels split up into five main missions, based on real events that occurred in World War II. Each mission's scope and vision is considerably larger than on previous *Medal of Honor* games. In *Frontline*, players once again take on the role of Lt. Jimmy Patterson. Amidst all the chaos surrounding Operation Market Garden, Patterson has to find a way to infiltrate enemy lines and steal a top-secret weapon known as the HO-IX flying wing—a deadly weapon that could sway the balance of war. With missions ranging from rescuing captured OSS operatives to destroying German bases, you can bet all the missions in *Frontline* will be compelling.

So what is this Operation Market Garden? Scott Langteau explains: "The scenario was when 30,000 troops were dropped onto bridges in Holland leading into Germany. That scenario was depicted in the movie *A Bridge Too Far*. It was a very poorly executed and poorly planned mission. It basically falls apart as soon as it takes off. We sort of borrowed that point in history and implemented that in Frontline. We also have a mission revolving around Nijmegen Bridge from the same movie. In the movie, the Nazis try to blow the bridge so the Allied Forces couldn't get across, but for some reason—and they don't explain this in the movie—the bridge doesn't blow. In our scenario, Patterson got there first and disarmed the charges, which prevented the bridge from blowing up." Later we learn that Patterson has to traverse the whole bridge span, taking out snipers, taking out bunkers and disarm the charges. Without question, this is exciting stuff.

New to *Frontline* is a small band of soldiers that will assist Patterson on some of his missions. Players not only have to worry about themselves but their team as well. You will be able to communicate and organize tactics against the enemy. In addition to additional units, players will enjoy a host of new weapons, including the Liberator Pistol, a Panzerschreck, and the MG42 mounted machine gun.

As one would expect, going to a next generation system, the visuals and graphics would be improved as well. "We're going to have full facial animations in *Frontline*, full emotion and expression, even full lip-syncing. When a Nazi solider is pissed off, you'll see it in his face as well as hear it in his voice. Characters now have roughly 2400 polys as opposed to 230 from previous games. We've also doubled our cast as well. So from every type of solider to everyday folk, we have included that as well."

Rest assured, *Medal of Honor: Frontline* is in more than capable hands. We can only imagine how real and compelling the whole experience is going to be when it finally arrives on the anniversary of D-Day this year. So on June 6, it's time to get your war on.

TOM HAM

"WITH THE HARDWARE, WE CAN HAVE BETTER ARCHITECTURE, BETTER LIGHTING, BETTER SOUND, BRAND NEW SCORE AND OVER 900 BRAND NEW ANIMATIONS."

PS2

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE

preview

developer: ea los angeles publisher: ea available: summer

Having *Medal of Honor* on the PS2 promises one thing: Fans of *Allied Assault* will finally have a console game in the franchise that equals the power of the PC—and then some.

SUPERMODEL

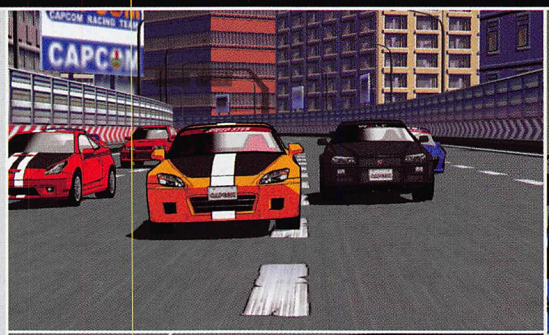
A Gran Turismo cartoon comes to life courtesy of Capcom

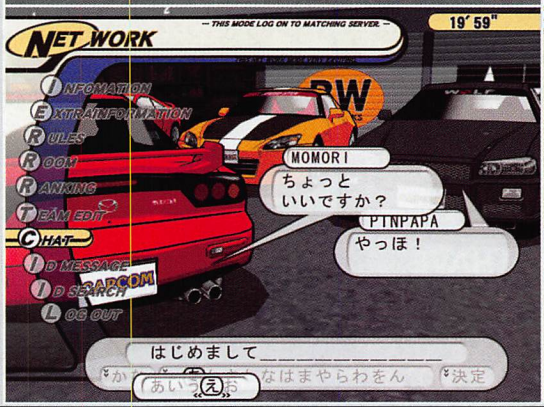
Isn't cel-shading a wonderful new toy for developers to play with? Still enjoying a grace period before its eventual over-use, cel-shading, when executed properly, is an almost startling visual style, one of those great things that was not even dreamed of five years ago. Look at a game like *Jet Set Radio*. Would it have nearly the same visual impact if it looked conventional like *Tony Hawk*? Of course not.

Now, Capcom is applying the technique to the *Gran Turismo*-esque *Automodellista*. If the idea of a cel-shaded GT sounds like a poor idea, look at these images. I think it's rather incredible. But there's more to this game than a simple visual re-imagining of GT. In Japan, *Automodellista* will be an online game, opening up a whole community to play around with. Of course, there will be plenty of chatting, but also the fun of challenging others to a race with your highly customized vehicle, sporting your own paint scheme and under-bonnet tweaks.

Since Sony is still rather tight-lipped on its plans to make the U.S. PlayStation 2 online capable, we can't know exactly when you will be able to play *Automodellista* online. We can safely say this year, but that just makes the wait more unbearable, doesn't it?

MICHAEL HOBBS





"IF THE IDEA OF A CEL-SHADED GRAN TURISMO SOUNDS LIKE A POOR IDEA, LOOK A THESE IMAGES."

Automodellista will be an online game in Japan. Will we be so lucky?

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

AUTOMODELLISTA | preview

developer: capcom | publisher: capcom | available: tba

The look of Automodelista is enough to get me interested, and coming from Capcom, it should play really well, even if the company is not known for making racers.

GETTIN' DIZZY WIDIT

the worlds most terrible toon spins back into action

The only Warner Bros. character worth building a video-game around is finally on his way back, set to enter the world of cel-shaded 3D with a cartoon-sized bang. This time around, Taz manages to rile his fellow WB cast mates to the extent that they finally cage the varmint. Upon his inevitable escape, they plaster the four corners of toon town with *Taz: Wanted* posters, thus creating the premise for the game. The goal in each massive hub is to remove the wanted signs—a seemingly simple task—but in the spirit of Looney Tunes the designers have cooked up ingenious ways of getting the job done. Behind each *Sonic*-style level interface lies a hub teeming with stuff to do. Everywhere you look there's somewhere you need to go shrouded in obstacles and or puzzles in classic chain-of- events style. It's all about cause and affect. Taz can rant and really shake things up, eat and spit out just about anything in the environment, spin on pinwheels to disable impassable objects, and even transform Superman-style in phone booths conveniently located throughout each busy world. Disguise attacks (you haven't lived until you've seen skater Taz—he seems so pleased with himself) are the name of the game to thwart the zoo keepers nets.

Surrounding the action, the game rides on a classic WB chassis but with a surprisingly standout soundtrack. Ditching the light-footed somewhat annoying (in a game at least) tinkle of the cartoon's tunes, Infogrames has taken the path less traveled and bathed the action in thick arcade style tuneage—a welcome change in the evolution of the license. Otherwise, a reluctant Tweety takes you through the games paces with plenty of self deprecating wit, and the action is packed with all the prerequisite blips and squeaks associated with the WB universe. Most importantly however, the cel-shaded visuals are more than up to the task at hand. The game is beaming with bright colors, solid models, and fluid animation all coasting along at a brisk clip. All the makings of a great new chapter in Taz gaming are afoot—a new spin on an old but incessantly lovable toon.

DAVE HALVERSON

PS2

TAZ: WANTED — preview

developer: infogrames publisher: infogrames available: may

Oh how I do love a good ol' game of taz, and this one here is shaping up to be a real, I said a real, hum dinger!

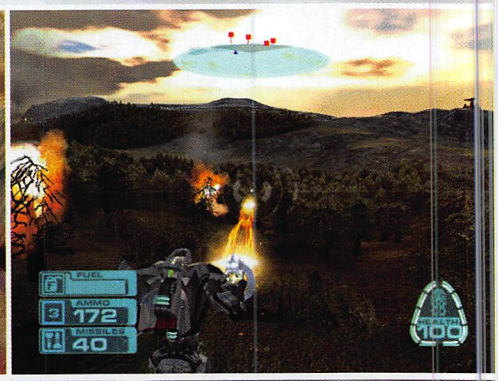
FULL METAL JACKET

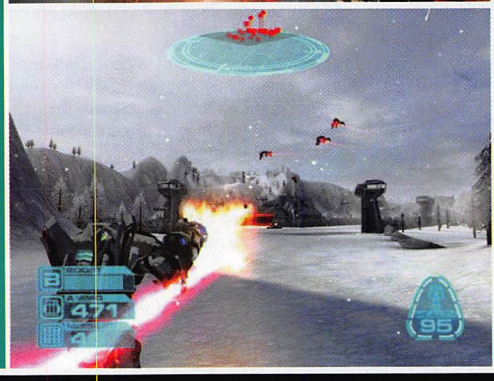
Mech fighting stomps onto the willing Xbox

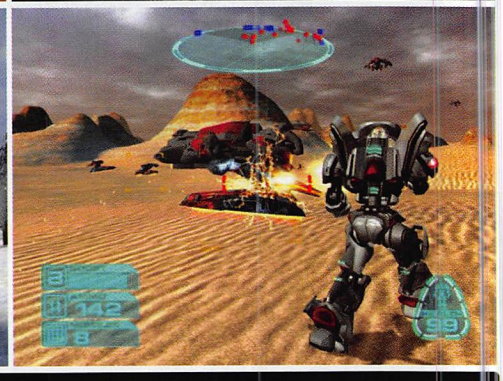
If you want to slide around in a mech these days, your options are limited. *Gun Griffon* will fill the void if you pilot a PS2, but if you're behind an Xbox pad, the well was dry until now. With Majesco's forthcoming *Gunmetal*, you'll not only fill the need to lumber about in a huge mech, but also take to the skies *Robotech*-style, when the terrain and enemy forces pose a threat best dealt with from the not-so-friendly skies.

You play the role of an elite mech pilot with the awesome responsibility of being your country's last line of defense. The enemy has breached the outer defenses and now it's up to you to squash what remains of the them. Playing an early version of the game, two things were evident: *Gunmetal* is going to be a visual feast and, if the designers can get a handle on the game's balance, an equally fun game to play. Our mech was severely out-gunned and out-maneuvered by the swarming enemy, but we were assured that the gameplay will be on par with the game's visuals by the time it goes gold. The team is still in the staging area regarding the game's overall balance and playability, so frame rate and gameplay issues are to be expected. Obvious issues aside, all the prerequisite parts are in place (diverse terrain, a comprehensive inventory system, real-time intel, etc.) and then some. In the then-some category, interactive environments make for a hyper-realistic experience as you mow down trees, smash buildings and even affect the ground with your tonnage. And that's not to mention details like herds of animals conducive to their environments...although I just did.

DAVE HALVERSON







XBOX

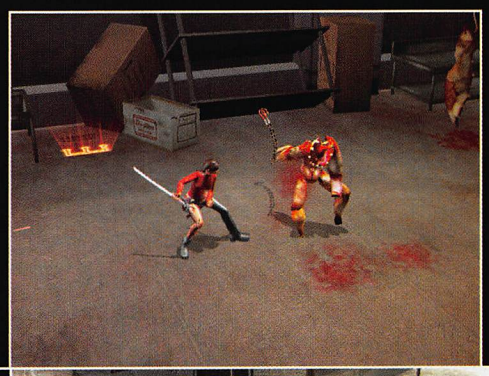
GUNMETAL — preview

developer: rage publisher: majesco available: summer

Gunmetal holds much promise. It's already a visual force. Now all rage has left to do is make it play as good as it looks.

LIVING DEAD GAME

We're gonna get bloody on this one

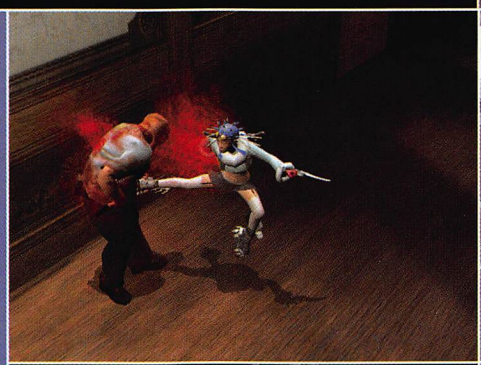


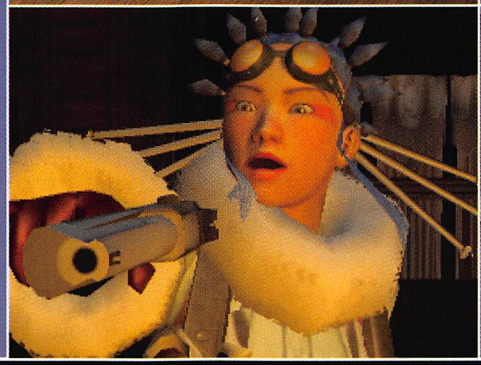
Imagine that rots, as they are called in Hunter: the Reckoning, are your kindling and the Xbox pad your igniter. If it's a fictitious no-holds-barred slaughter you crave, and we all need a good one now and again, well, then I reckon your game is at hand. Four characters await—two male and two female—for your slaying pleasure, all witness to the shocking fact that the living dead walk among us. All that gang violence and murder you've been hearing about? All monsters, and now it's payback time.

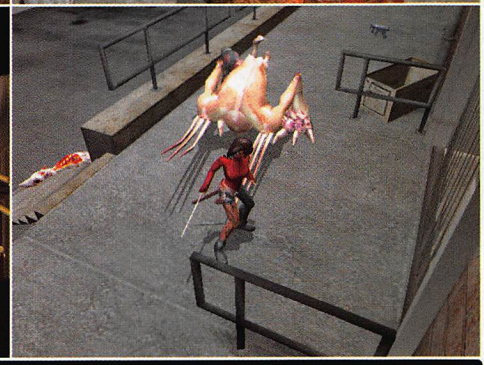
The developers at High Voltage are living and breathing every detail of their horror-themed actioner, from the weapons and attacks, of which there are many (and even more subtle nuances), to the particle system and fine details like water and fire; indeed, the effects and artillery are impressive. Flamethrowers belch out fire that looks hot, and spells conjure up colorful gasses from the belly of the Xbox. This team understands the importance of play mechanics, real-time cinemas with lip synching, a solid camera and, most of all, 60-frames—the creed games like this live or die by. I believe this patient is going to live.

Some other early aspects of the game I appreciate are Zombie Dismemberment (always a plus: they won't need arms and legs where they're going anyway, and they make great gifts) and the amount of rots on screen (I call it the R.O.S. system). The zombie quotient in Hunter is truly ominous, imparting a true sense of not only dread but peril, and the music comes along for the ride, spilling out chills in Dolby 5.1 that'll have you busting out the black eyeliner. The game's got a ways to go, but by the time all 25 levels are buttoned up and the bosses (you'll never look at a teddy bear the same way again) put to rest, Hunter: The Reckoning should be just what the pathologist ordered.

DAVE HALVERSON







XBOX

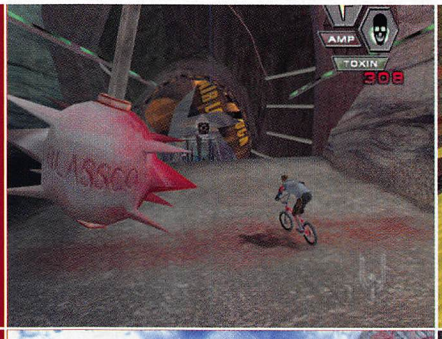
HUNTER: THE RECKONING | preview

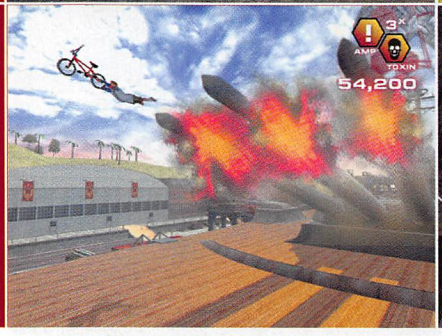
developer: digital mayhem | publisher: interplay | available:summer

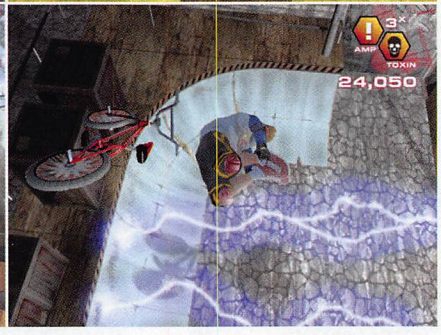
If it's pure unadulterated action you seek, this may be the game you've been dying for. Digital mayhem is buttoning up Hunter with great care, mulling over every detail.

ROAD RASH

The *Dark Summit* formula gets down and dirty in a BMX gauntlet of spikes, pendulums and flesh-eating acid







THQ is latching onto the concept of story-driven, mission-based extreme sports like no one ever anticipated. As a sophomore effort, a follow-up to the thoroughly enjoyable *Dark Summit*, comes their attempt at spinning the BMX category into something more than a Dave Mirra-branded universe.

Toxic Grind is like an awkward cocktail in that sense, a blend of classically embraced BMX elements with the sadistic TV game-show climate of *The Running Man*. Set in the year 2097, gamers assume the role of expert BMX rider Jason Hayes, a time-traveling teen that is literally forced to ride for his life, along with other rogue players, through a deadly gauntlet of pain. Dixon Von Blass, the show's villainous host, has injected a deadly toxin into each rider's bloodstream. Herein, surreal objectives must be completed and fatal obstacles navigated in order to keep the poison in check. Bloodshed equals ratings; and a death, indeed, equals higher ad rates for the network.

Ultimately, *Toxic Grind* differs from traditional BMX offerings by shifting the playing field from free-roaming to a more concentrated crash course, as if you're peddling your way through a track in *SSX* instead of performing tricks in a drained-out swimming pool. There are 14 futuristic worlds in total, many torn from modern day settings but enhanced with distinctly fantastical aspects. New York City, the Roman Coliseum and Bourbon Street are among a few of *Grind*'s ominous environments—each featuring sublimely dynamic ramps, moving platforms and grind rails. Not to mention, vats of acid, pits of fire and miscellaneous razor-sharp objects are scattered randomly into each course.

Yet, probably most enjoyable, at least for the Stan Lee geek in all of us, is *Grind*'s unique approach to the plot-points of the game. Each cinema is presented in a distinct comic book mode (overlain with narration like *Max Payne*, just more colorful and reminiscent of vintage Jack Kirby—with a modern flair, of course), but it's inherently more violent than most Marvel products. When poor Jason accidently rams into a spike, he is catapulted off his bike and left to clinch his stomach as blood gushes out.

Sure, it may seem like an unlikely combo, but *Toxic Grind* admittedly speeds in an innovative direction—and if developer Blue Shift oils the gears just right, you'll start to see a new trend in gamedom emerge.

JON M GIBSON

NINTENDO GAMECUBE XBOX

TOXIC GRIDE preview

developer: blue shift publisher: thq available: summer

This is the first game in the BMX genre to finally try to do something unique—and for that it gets major props. Don't expect to see much Dave Mirra flavor here.

RUNNING MAN

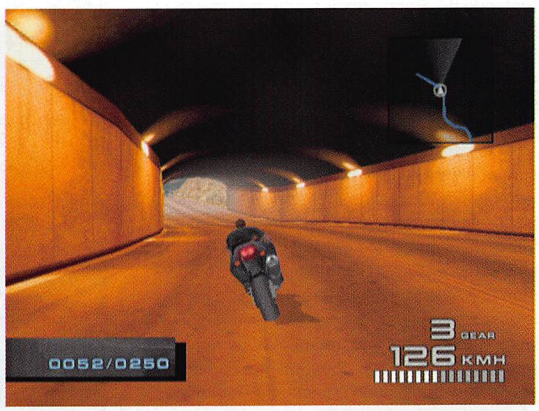
Sega's long (really long) awaited Headhunter finally comes out of hiding

A-ha! Here it is! Finally, *Headhunter* comes up for air after two years on the MIA list. Developed by the Amuze branch at Sega Europe, the game was shown briefly on a tiny screen in a massive TV wall two trade shows ago; no one at Sega even knew what it was. Well, obviously it was part of the Acclaim/Sega deal then pres. Bernie Stohler inked before he packed up his cigars (and his stock), made like a Golden and got Axed. Luckily, Headhunter was early enough to boost its specs up to PS2 standards, unlike Crazy Taxi and 18-Wheeler (there's a waste of disc space), which, to this day, look like Dreamcast games, and iffy ones at that.

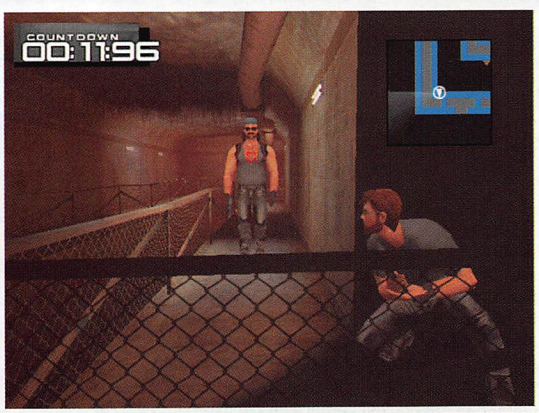
A mish-mash of science fiction and action influences, *Headhunter* runs the déjàvu gamut. The storyline has *RoboCop, Demolition Man*, and *Dirty Harry* written all over it, and the gameplay shows shades of *Metal Gear, Duke Nukem* and *GTA*—fortunately, all to great effect. This is a great game.

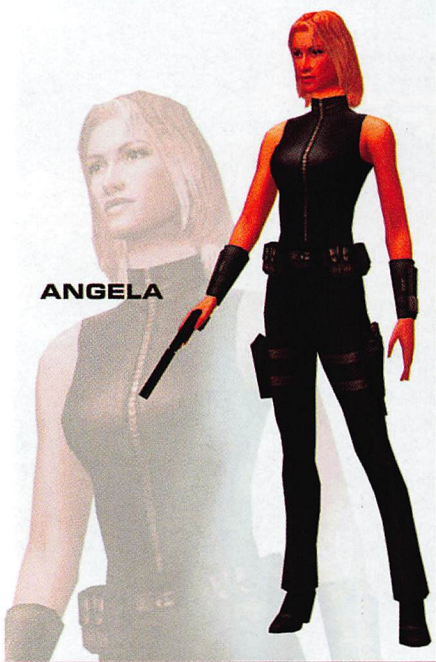
You play the parts of both Jack Wade, a Bounty Hunter suffering from a slight case of amnesia in a world gone mad (evidenced by the overused but effective RoboCop-style news-cast bits), and Angela Stern, the foxy lady who hires him from his hospital bed-side to find out who killed her father, the man responsible for all of the joy-joy feelings going around in the presumed Utopian society. In a world where criminals' organs are "donated" to good citizens (which was my idea) and bioengineering is rampant, it's obvious that Jack has been tampered with, but he doesn't know by who or why. He's been thrown off the force and driven into private service, joining the dregs as a Headhunter. Anyway, you get the gist. The game, in which you ride a sweet rice burner from place to place, has all of the sniping, gunplay, and secret agent-style gizmos of the Metal Gear franchise, but they are dispensed in a more Max Payne-ish environment as you thwart battle biker gangs and corporate slimeballs. Our test version was a bit buggy, but we're assured a final burn is forthcoming in time for a review next month. Look for it.

DAVE HALVERSON



"THE STORYLINE HAS ROBOCOP, DEMOLITION MAN AND DIRTY HAIRY WRITTEN ALL OVER IT"





PS2

HEADHUNTER — preview

developer:sega publisher: acclaim available: may

I love everything about this game. It's like Sega's answer to the espionage formula with a grittier exterior. This is going to be good.

BOMBERMAN GENERATION

by DAVE HALVERSON

You'd be hard pressed to find any old- school gamer who doesn't absolutely love Bomberman—and for good reason. Not only has the game traditionally provided hours of puzzle-licious fun, but as a multiplayer game, it's been known to consume entire days. With the advent of next-generation consoles, beginning with the Nintendo 64, Bomberman graduated, starring in his first bonafied solo adventure game—bombs in tow—opening the way before him and thwarting all who stand in his way by kicking, throwing and doing just about anything else you can imagine the only way he knows how—blowing stuff up!

This latest installment, which we had the pleasure of playing briefly when Majesco sent some love our way (including *Bloodrayne*—but we can't elaborate on that... yet) has Bomberman doing more of the same, the biggest difference being the new cel-shaded visuals that bring the Bomberman universe to a new, vibrant life. The game is absolutely alive with color and animation. We weren't able to get into the meat of gameplay, but we imagine the final product will rank among the year's very best action adventures—the bonus, of course, being classic Bomberman action built in!

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BEING THE NEW CEL-SHADED VISUALS THAT BRING THE BOMBERMAN UNIVERSE TO A NEW, VIBRANT LIFE"

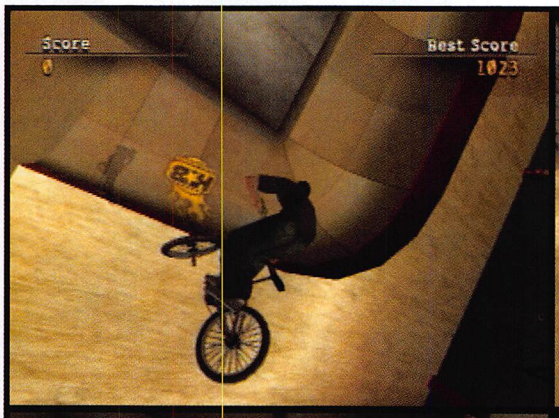
preview

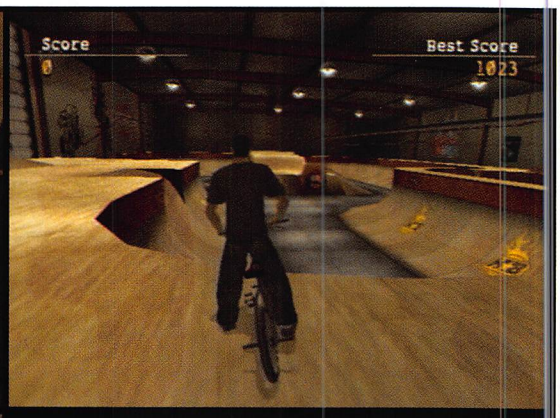
developer: hudson
publisher: majesco
available: tba

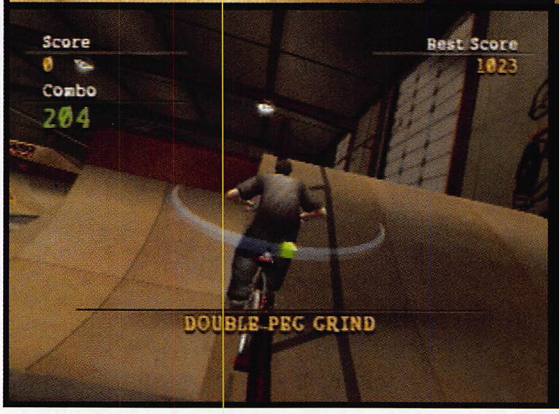
MATT HOFFMAN PRO BMX 2

by DAVE HALVERSON

It's official: Rainbow Studios has officially been discovered. The creators of *ATV Off-Road Fury* (arguably the best racing game ever made) and *Splashdown* have hit the big time. Let's pray they don't lose their insane penchant for quality. It began with *Star Wars: Racer Revenge*, and now they're at the helm—well, handlebars—of *Matt Hoffman Pro BMX 2*—sweet Slipknot-style music to any BMXer's ears. Although early, the new game has the coolest camera I have ever seen in an extreme sports game. If you get dizzy playing 3D games, play in the bathroom. Somehow they put you on the bike; it's quite fab. And of course the visuals are just sick, with ramps as smooth as a baby's butt and free-roaming environs that'll send Mirra running home to mommy. The game design is also tweaked a bit, taking us on a road trip with 10 top pros. Can't wait for more.







RAINBOW STUDIOS ENTERS THE BMX ARENA, TAKING THE HELM ON HOFFMAN'S CROSS-COUNTRY ESCAPADE

preview

developer: rainbow studios
publisher: activision
available: tba

ONE OF THE SEXIEST LOOKING NEW XBOX GAMES, *BUFFY* LOOKS TO BE WORTH THE WAIT

preview

developer: collective
publisher: ea
available: tba

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

by SHANE REED

For how cool and universally loved *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is, why is the show buried on an obscure wrestling network while I am made to endure cheesy sitcoms and embarrassing awards shows geared towards my mother? Luckily, the chosen one seems to be getting a little more respect in her video game debut, as there are few finer pedigree than EA. Although Buffy (Michelle Gellar) is one of the only cast members not lending her voice to the game (is Buffy a snob? nah), the game, as you can see, looks amazing. We can only pray that it plays as well. Fighting off the Old Ones, including their 600-year-old master (bet he's smart), everyone will be Kung Fu Fighting-kicking vampire ass this Spring. Get your Slayer Sense ready, people: Sunnyvale is comin' home.

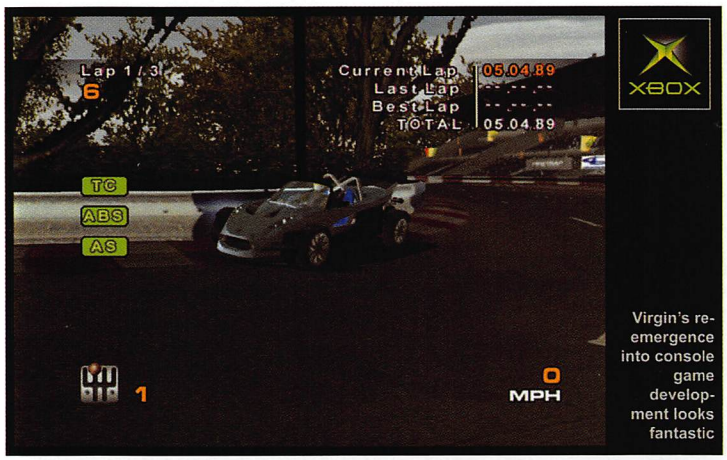
LOTUS ARCADE

preview

developer: kuju publisher: virgin available: june

by Brady Fiechter

Now here's an obscure source for inspiration: *Lotus Arcade*, an arcade racer featuring the prestigious Lotus sports cars, has pulled the car driven by Patrick McGoohan in the 1970s British television show *The Prisoner*. As a huge fan of this classic innocent-man-oppressed-by-the-System work, I'm looking forward to the game for the chance to take control of this car alone. Another sweet car at your disposal is the ultra-cool Esprit recklessly driven by Roger Moore's Bond. Pick your personal favorite machine and zip through globe-spanning courses in London, Hethel, Tokyo, and many more. Looks like Virgin is back in the race! Welcome home.



Virgin's re-emergence into console game development looks fantastic

FREEKSTYLE

preview

developer: ea publisher: ea available: june

by DAVE HALVERSON

Opting for a fantasy Motocross game in place of another stadium sim (damn!), EA Big is going for something freaky with *Freekstyle*, an SSX-meets-Motocross game with an emphasis on, you guessed it, tricks (which I hear are for kids). There's still a circuit game mode, but how well you do will rely on successfully pulling off mad air as much as it does racing skills. Freestyle, Freeride and split-screen head-to-head action are in the pipe as well, so smoke it. With eight riders on tap including Metzger, Deegan, Bau, Patterson, Jones, and Albertyn, and nine locales to go ape shit in, the two- wheeled equivalent of *SSX* should kick some serious ass. Even the former Miss Supercross Leeann Tweeden, er, saddles up for some motocross action. Now that's worth getting dirty for.

With their latest stab at motocross ea break from their sim. roots opting for BIG action

ARMORED CORE 3

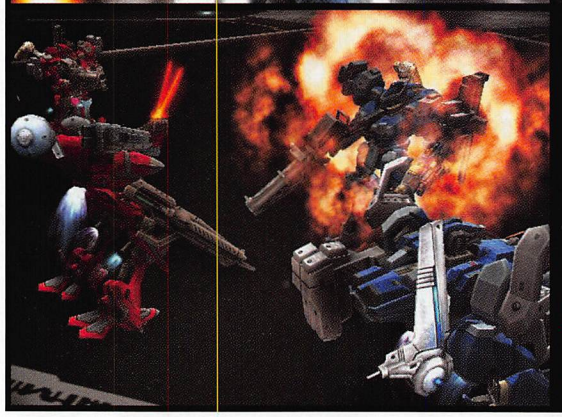
by BRADY FIECHTER

Nothing gets the testosterone pumping quite like controlling a mech, annihilating everything in its path. There is a raw, unadulterated appeal to these awesome machines of war, and as any self-respecting mech fan will attest, the *Armored Core* series is the top of the mech experience.

Familiarity exists in *Armored Core 3*, but a ton of enhancements and new options are being layered in: new designs, original unit functions, freedom to construct and customize mechs with added parts.

AC opponents can once again receive pummeling in Arena play, a great testing ground for a new unit and the perfect place to perfect piloting skills for the missions play. Head-to-head competitions extend the game's lifespan, and for the first time in the series, teams of two-on-two can get it on.

While a fine game, *Armored Core 2* wasn't so much different from its predecessor, but, with *Armored Core 3*, more care has been taken to fend off staleness. And with the completely reworked engine, its, at the very least, easily the most visually appealing Core yet.



"NOTHING GETS YOUR TESTOSTERONE PUMPING QUITE LIKE CONTROLLING A MECH"

preview

developer: from software
publisher: agetech
available: summer

PS2

EVOLUTION WORLDS

preview

developer: sting publisher: Ubi Soft available: fall

by DAVE HALVERSON

Having spawned several comic book episodes and a graphic novel in Japan, *Evolution* has become a successful franchise with a loyal–albeit small in the US due to the fact that up until now it resided on the Dreamcast–following. This Fall Gamecube users will not only get a taste of the Evolution universe, but will do so with the most ambitious game in the series yet. Evolution Worlds will boast improved visuals, and animation along with new game play and special battle modes. Although the dungeon play will remain pretty much the same, there will be potentially more towns and environments, something the DC games were sorely lacking. We have some tricks up our sleeves on this one, so stay tuned.

Sting's loveable dungeon rpg continues to digi-volve this time on GameCube

KING'S FIELD IV

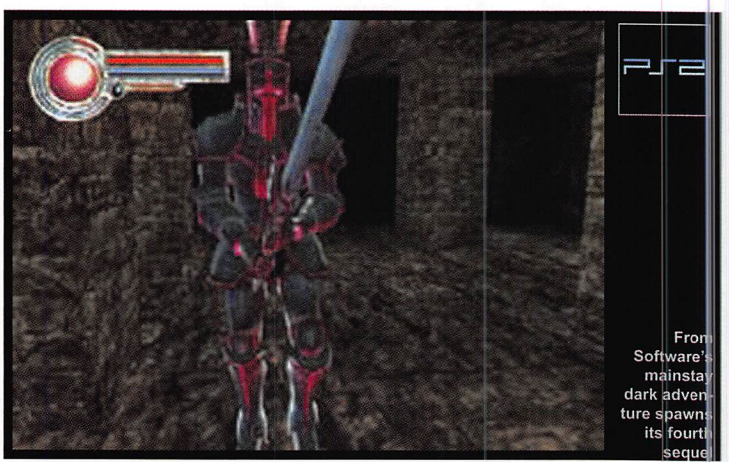
preview

developer: from software publisher: agetec available: may

by BRADY FIECHTER

The *King's Field* series has always appealed to a unique gaming palette, one that appreciates a slower, more deliberate pace and quieter atmosphere. *Kings Field IV* is remaining faithful to the game's heritage—either embrace it or stay out of the dungeon.

In this latest fantasy quest, you once again wield a sword and command the forces of magic, exploring the depths of an ancient city that has been discovered buried under a tundra of snow and ice. A spare, strangely inviting tone of loneliness flows through the game's very familiar Kings Field-like spaces. Fans of the series have nothing to worry about.



From Software's mainstay dark adventure spawns its fourth seque

T•HQ WAVES THE CHECKERED FLAG ON THE FOURTH INSTALLMENT IN THE CHARMICHAEL FRANCHISE

preview

developer: pacific coast power and light
publisher: thq
available: summer

PS2 XBOX

SUPERFLY

by DAVE HALVERSON

After an amazing outing on both the PS2 and Xbox, the Ricky Charmichael franchise will soon ride again, courtesy of Pacific Coast Power and Light. Beyond the obviously bolstered freestyle venue, which they should toss out altogether in my opinion, the new game will stretch across every console and include an expanded career mode—the key ingredient in the success of the series thus far. Altogether look for 22 new tracks as well as wide open freestyle worlds. Piling on more needless baggage a "powerful" freestyle stunt track editor" is also being added along with mini games– whoopee! With a little luck all of these me-too Extreme Sports fad-tastic extra's won't eat to far into the game's overall integrity. But I'd be lying if I didn't say I was worried. Whatever happened to pure racing? Last year's model was so near perfect; if only they'd concentrate solely on making this the *Ridge Racer* of Motocross. On a positive note, particle effects, reflection mapping, and dirt accumulation on the riders (ala' MX Rider) will be added to the already excellent visual presentation of the game. Don't get me wrong on this one, I'm as excited about the next RC MX as anybody, but only because I want to feel the physics and adrenaline associated with professional motocross. Freestyle is cool to watch, for a minute, but making it the focal point of a franchise seems like a dangerous endeavor. Time will tell.

EA BIG GETS DOWN IN THE SNOW BRINGING THEIR BAG OF TRICKS TO SNO-CROSS

preview

developer: ea
publisher: ea
available: may

PS2

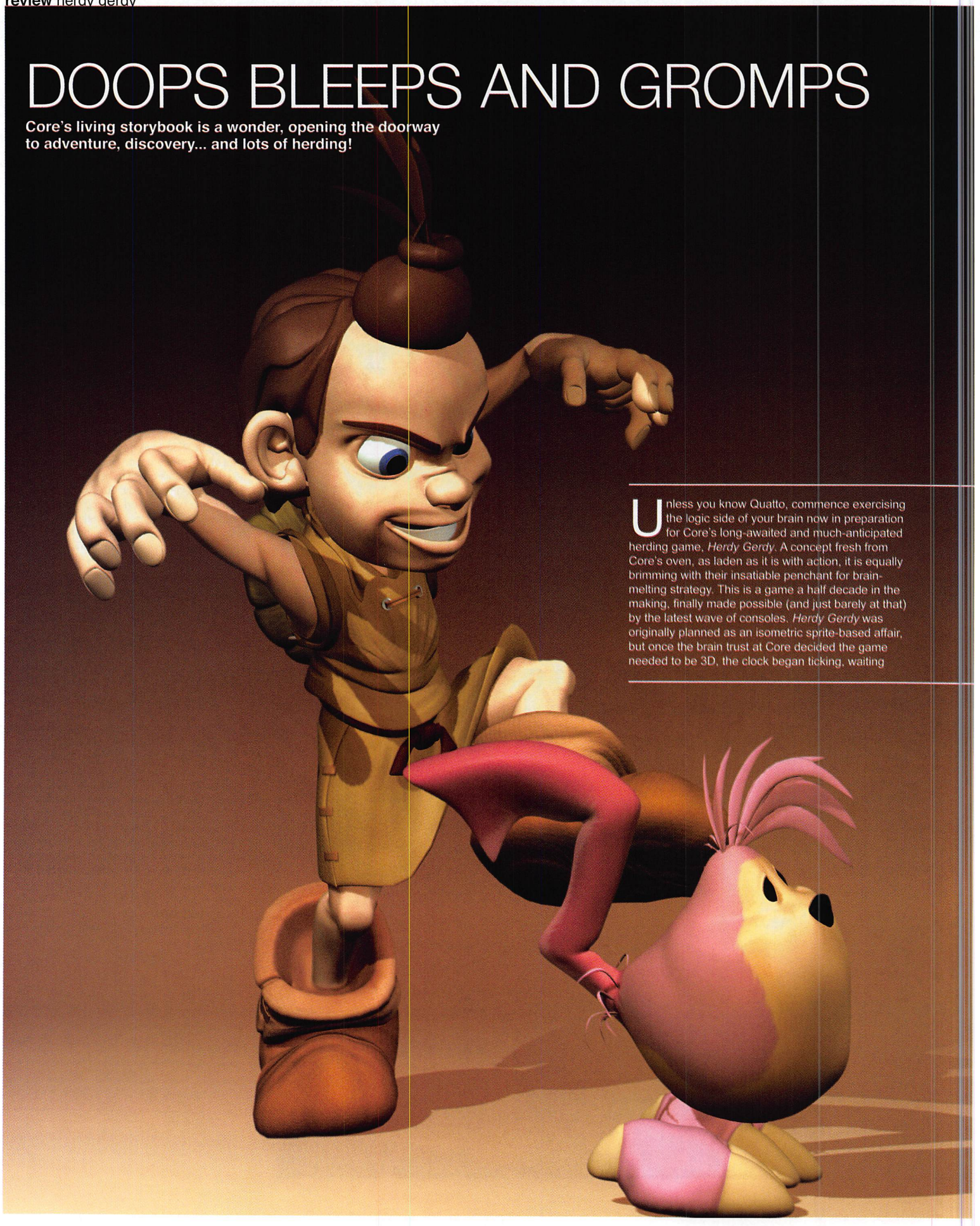
SLEDSTORM

by DAVE HALVERSON

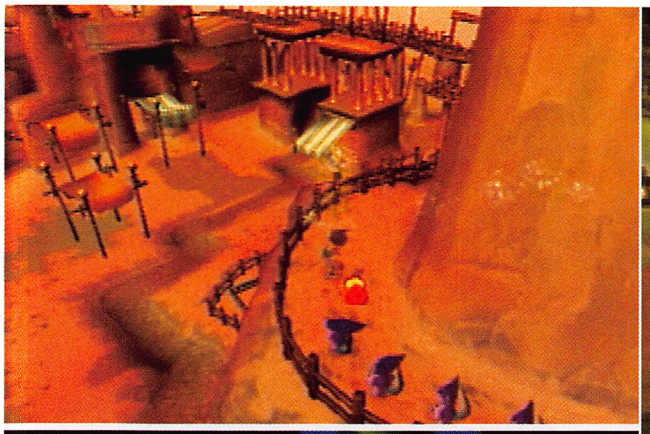
Why stop at snowboarding and motocross when Sno-Cross is all the rage? With a physics engine and camera designed to convey the awesome power and grace of 41 unique sleds inspired by the real thing—quad sleds that make the old mono sliders feel like relics—*Sled Storm* promises to deliver a sno-cross game worth more than a day's play. Blasting through seven locales (including Sweden, France and Argentina—don't cry for me) over all sorts of crazy white stuff with course names like Bermuda Berg, Polar Fest, and Beast from the East, I can only imagine what Big will throw at us this time. Look for all the sparkling personality of *SSX* along with some of the boost as well. I especially like the STORM boost.

DOOPS BLEEPS AND GROMPS

Core's living storybook is a wonder, opening the doorway to adventure, discovery... and lots of herding!



Unless you know Quatto, commence exercising the logic side of your brain now in preparation for Core's long-awaited and much-anticipated herding game, *Herdy Gerdy*. A concept fresh from Core's oven, as laden as it is with action, it is equally brimming with their insatiable penchant for brain-melting strategy. This is a game a half decade in the making, finally made possible (and just barely at that) by the latest wave of consoles. *Herdy Gerdy* was originally planned as an isometric sprite-based affair, but once the brain trust at Core decided the game needed to be 3D, the clock began ticking, waiting



for technology to catch up with their splendid (and characteristically peculiar) vision. They've tried mixing strategy with action once before with a Genesis game by the name of Bubba 'n Stix. This was a brilliant 16-bitter, yet only the most hardened gamer, the kind that squints at the sight of the sun, could crack its insane puzzles and platform savvy. This time out they've done one better by adding to the mix astounding visuals and a living storybook framework, housing some of the most spellbinding gameplay to come along since, well, last month. Hey, what can I say, things are good.

While Herdy Gerdy is a herding game in which you must pen a variety of squirrely critters, it's probably not what you're thinking. There are piles of role-playing, puzzle-solving and action- platforming bits in here too, all devised with the utmost cleverness. The Gerdy team dug deep in bringing this game to light, and it shows in every facet of the game. The story revolves around Gerdy, the son of a master herder in a land where herding is akin to political office. So brilliant is Gerdy's papa that his rival, Sadorf, has placed him under a sleeping spell to keep him from winning the big tournament, where the victor will gain dominion throughout the realm. Sadorf (through ill-gotten means) has possessed the acorn of creation and intends to rule with its power. Only a master herder can stop him, and now it's up to Gerdy to put things right. Setting out on an epic adventure, Gerdy must acquire the tools and the talent to wake up his dad and save the realm. This creates a setting much like any Zelda game you've ever played; as you go about your business (and what sweet business it is), in each level you'll catch glimpses of things you can't yet attain or do. As you obtain items, and the abilities that go with them, you must return to previous territories where you will gain access to the game's many wondrous tiers—a storybook world brimming with personality and charms.

You spend the bulk of your time strategically herding Doops, Gromps, Bleeps, and other utterly peculiar creatures, each with a specific pen to house them as well as a specific tool to attract them. All the while hungry Gromps look on with one thing on their mind: eating machines. Gromps will swallow anything they can cram into their fat, pink, furry pie holes, including Doops, Bleeps, and anything else they decide looks edible. If you're leading a herd of Doops or Bleeps and a Gromp is nearby, he'll mosey over and begin to devour them like Crispy Creams at a Richard Simmons seminar. So you need to pen the Gromps first by luring them and then running like hell over a Gromp pen. Some Gromp

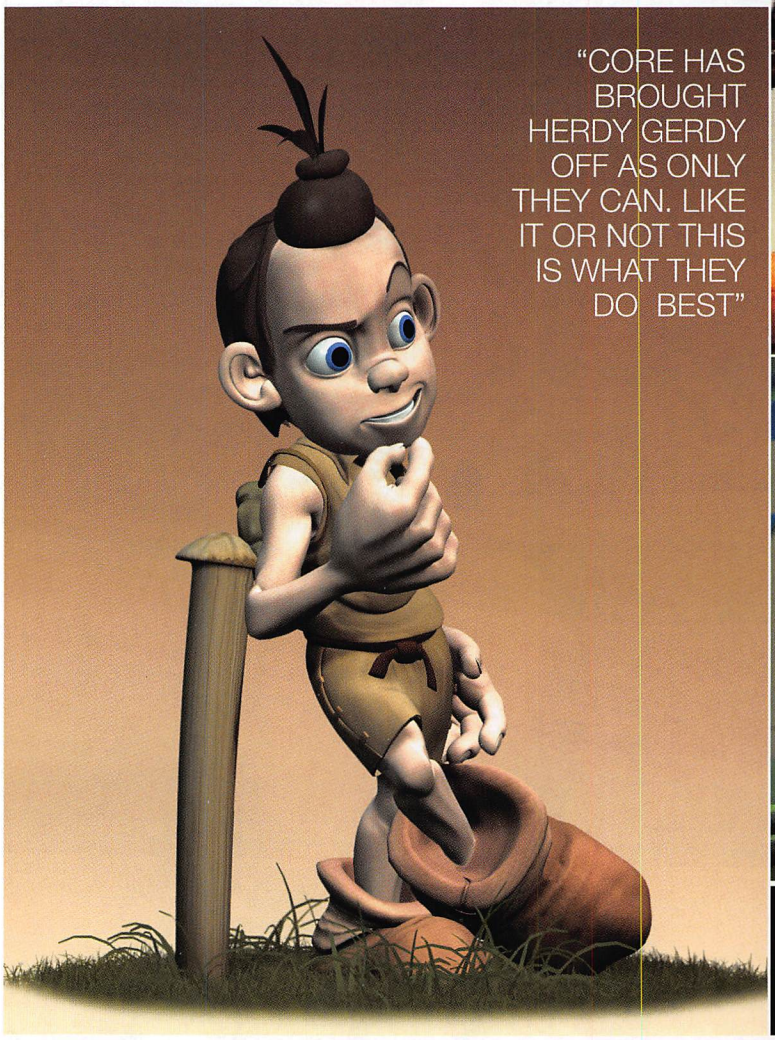
"THIS IS A GAME A HALF DECADE IN THE MAKING FINALLY MADE POSSIBLE BY THE LATEST WAVE OF CONSOLES"

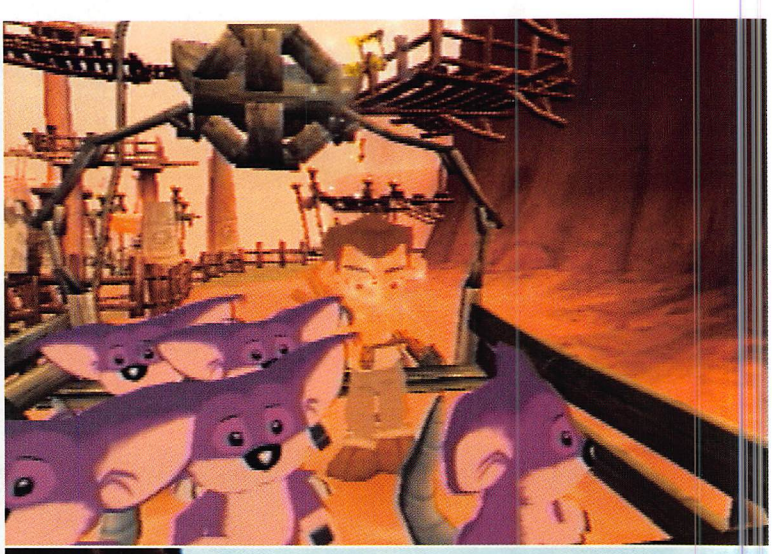
pens are located in close proximity to other pens, though, so it's not recommended you park a Gromp too close. Therein lies one of the game's many perplexing scenarios. You (being Gerdy) and the Gromps begin each area with icons on either side of a progress bar with locks in the middle. As Gerdy herds critters he eats his way to the right while the Gromps munch to the left each time they dine on one of your flock. If they eat the locks before Gerdy, it's a do-over. Of course, this is only one aspect of the game. There are also quests to fulfill, people to see, and challenges to be won in order to gain the tools needed to jump higher, climb rickety ladders, push heavy blocks, sound horns, etc., etc. It's one big epic adventure set to magical music within enchanted areas.

Regarding the two major hurdles Core faced: somehow keeping the frame rate up and the camera in control amidst massive detailed landscapes I believe they've mastered the art of give and take. They could have locked the camera and, therefore, line of sight down and given us a steady 60-fps, but the game just wouldn't be the same. Instead, the frame rate performs in conjunction with where you are in the game. It rarely, if ever, drops below 30, and never impedes the game—quite the feat taking into account the math they're cramming through the CPUs. The camera works in much the same way. In close proximity to Gerdy it rarely skips a beat, but zoomed back when running through tight spaces, it can snap about now and again, but you become aware of its limitations and how to use it early on; it's really quite user friendly. The most important aspect of this game is an overwhelming sense of freedom, and I'm glad they didn't sacrifice that for a bit of tech we can easily live without.

In a nutshell (make that an acorn), Core has brought *Herdy Gerdy* off as only they can. Like it or not, this is what they do best. The character designs and architecture at work here are pure vintage Core. It makes you pine for Chuck Rock's next gig and long for another pure-bred platformer like Wonderdog. If Lara never throws another lever to open some far away door, I couldn't care less: they've mined that tunnel and defined that genre. Now it's time to get back to business. Lord knows they've amassed enough pounds to do whatever the heck they please.

DAVE HALVERSON





Meet "Gromp"- It won't hurt Herdy once he's penned it, but otherwise, it would chase him to the ends of the earth, eating ever thing in its path.

PS2

HERDY GERDY

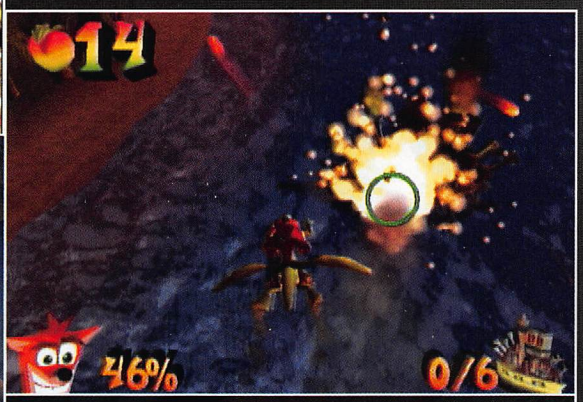
play rating ●●●●●

developer: CORE design publisher: eidos available: now

Special doesn't begin to tell the tale. I can't remember being this immersed in a world. Herdy Gerdy is a one of a kind experience. A truly special game.

MIGHT AS WELL JUMP

platforming finally crash's onto xbox:.. and it's all fuzzy!



All buttoned up and ready for team green, Crash Bandicoot is geared up for his Xbox debut with a new coat of fur, a few added tweaks, and a spot of bump-mapping. While it's not bump-mapping on par with the standard set by *Shrek*, it's enough to show that Universal made the most of the small window they had between the PS2 and Xbox launches.

In case you haven't heard (or read), the majority of the U.S. press strafed *The Wrath of Cortex* on PS2 for being more of the same with graphical enhancements; that being pretty much what I look for in a sequel, along with added gameplay elements, I couldn't be happier. Apparently the Japanese press agrees with me: *Famitsu* gave *Crash* 9 out of 10, and it's been in the top 10 there since it hit the streets. In other words, if you're a Crash fan, or better yet, a fan of the Crash dynamic created by Naughty Dog and now carried on by Traveller's Tales, your reading the right review. On the other hand, if you've had it up to that line everyone draws when they use that cliché, then you best leave this Bandicoot on the shelf.

I was as skeptical as any Crash fan going in, peering at the quasi-vehicle overload on display: Copter-Pak, Jeep, Glider, Mech-Walker, Sub, Scooter. Did Crash break a leg or something? In the end, however, TT made the most of the best new dynamics in the game—a transparent sphere adding a *Marble Madness* vibe to the Crash blueprint; the Sub (always a crowd pleaser); and the flyin' gizmos. The Jeep he uses for all of two minutes, the Copter Pak only twice (although, I could have done with more; it's a fun ride), and the rest just enough to mix things up, but not stray to far from the formula. This is TT's best effort to make a great game of Crash, staying true to his roots, while not stepping on any toes or paws—a tall order seeing as how Crash on the PlayStation was so fantastic; it still looks better than 50% of what's available on today's more powerful consoles. They've caressed the music to great effect, made the bosses a bit more challenging, adhered to a massive replayability standard that would drive any developer to drink and, of course, glopped on enough gorgeous visuals to rock anyone's world. If that's a bad thing, then I'm Fried Chicken.

DAVE HALVERSON

XBOX

CRASH: THE WRATH OF CORTEX

play rating

developer: traveller's tales publisher: vivendi universal available: now

Traveller's Tales have dressed up Crash in his Sunday best for his big Xbox debut, where he'll likely be greeted with open arms. Wrath is gorgeous, and pure fun from start to finish.

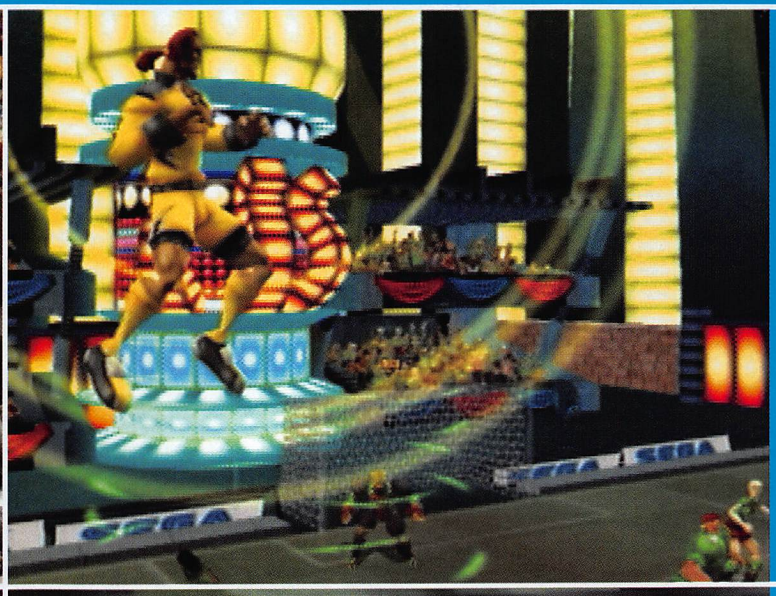
GOAL!!!!!

In terms of future sports–Sega Soccer Slam is the reigning king. This may just be the best high energy sports game on the planet.

Who better to reawaken future sports than the company who perfected the simulation, Visual Concepts. As groundbreaking as NFL 2K was when it debuted in the Fall of '99, *Soccer Slam* is equally, if not more, stunning in its own right, exhibiting a level of detail, creativity, and all-out exuberance seldom, if ever, seen in a sports game. Tailor made for the GameCube (thank you one thousand times, VC), the game lets us finally see the console in its element and, as expected, it's a glorious site. *Soccer Slam* crams so much razzle dazzle into each pint-sized (compared to a regulation soccer field) arena that it speeds up your heart rate—before you start playing. You've never seen crowds like these, domes like these, or character models like these, and once you do, your ass is theirs.

Featuring six teams in a multi-mode three-on-three (plus a goalie) venue, it's like regular video soccer in that you can highlight the character closest to the ball or lock onto just one and pass, dribble, or shoot the ball. But that, I'm happy to say, is where the similarities end and the fun begins. Aside from dekes, hits, headers, steals and more subtle nuances than you can shake a purple controller at, each team possesses special skills indicative of their origins. Sub Zero, for instance, power up into an icy furry while El Fuego dish out fiery special kicks, all accompanied by mind-blowing special effects. Each painstakingly realistic character (wait until you see this lip syncing—unbelievable) also has a specific goal celebration and spotlight kick—a slow-motion assault that'll have you drooling like a soccer Mom at an SUV sale—to go along with their more than1000 motion-captured maneuvers. Ad to the mix a massive real-time polygonal crowd that actually mimics the flow of the action on the field, and one slick mutha Brit announcer Tony Stigs, and you've got pure magic.

Another aspect of the game I appreciated was the realistic presentation of a season. Playing in the Continental Cup quest mode, when you lose a match, the headlines change, as news of your pitiful performance hits newsstands, but the game goes on. Like any real season you pick up the pieces and move on. All of teams seem to fall under the same scrutiny, creating an atmosphere with a true build-up to the season finale. The first time my Sub Zero's came up against Volta they waxed the grass with me, but deep into the season we met again and I squeaked out a victory. My queen Lola even made the All-Star



The in-game models exhibit perfect lip synching and gorgeous animation

game at the break and played with one of their goons.

Once again, this is what happens when developers exploit the strengths of a given console letting quality win over greed. GameCube owners finally–after an enthusiasm sapping run of dismal ports–get some respect. A glimmer of light among a vicious cycle of too much recycled extreme crap and throw-away sports junk. *Soccer Slam* breath's new life into the system and gives us a taste of what real GameCube games can look like– an exciting proposition indeed. Hopefully enough companies will follow suit to make it a viable console beyond those rare first party triumphs and Miyamoto's magic. That's just not enough anymore… Times, they are most definitely changing.

DAVE HALVERSON

"THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DEVELOPERS EXPLOIT THE STRENGTHS OF A GIVEN CONSOLE, LETTING QUALITY WIN OVER GREED"

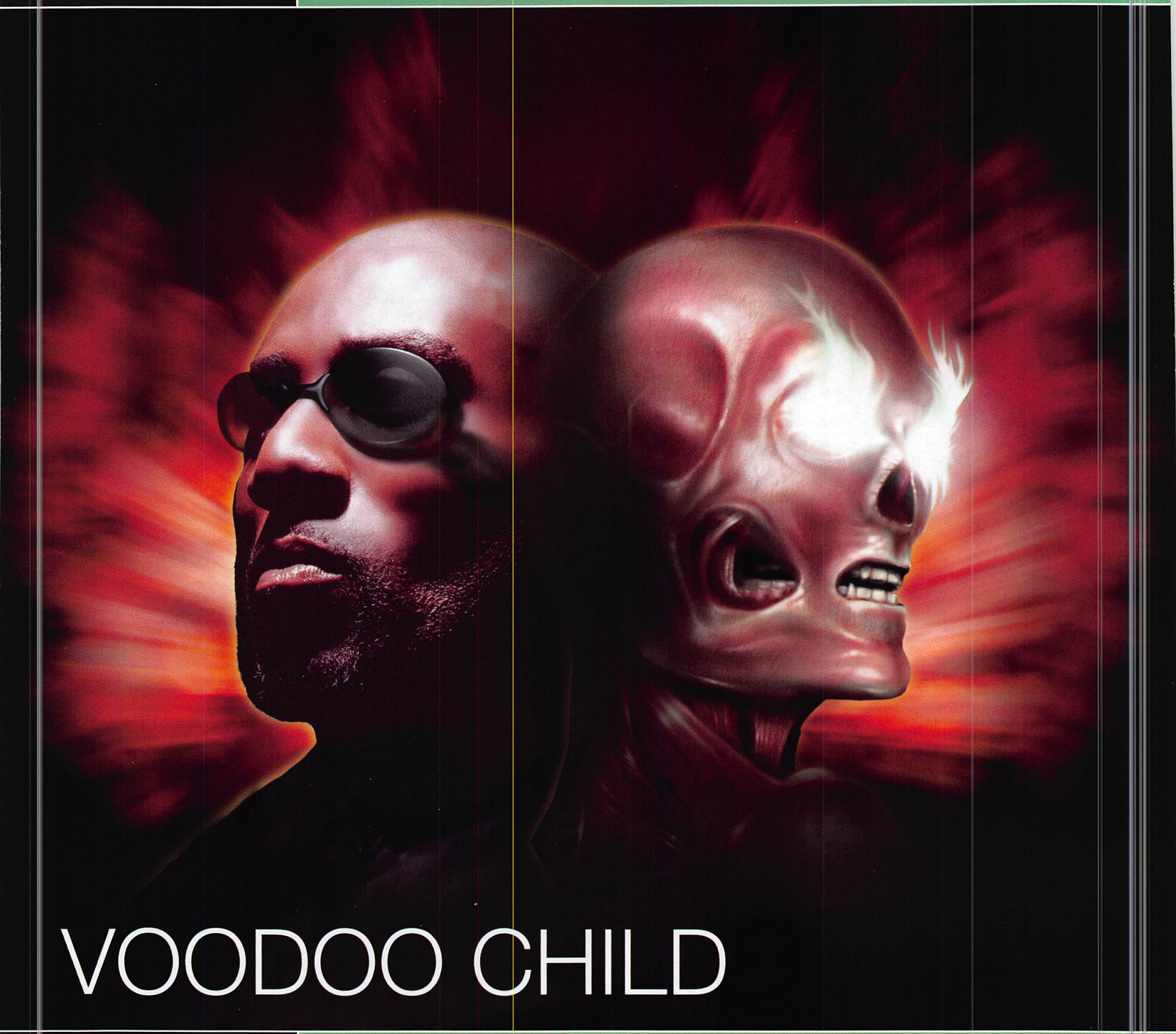
NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SEGA SOCCER SLAM

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

developer: visual concepts publisher: sega available: now

Visual concepts never cease to amaze me. We all know they create the best simulations, but who knew they had this game in them. A franchise is born!



VOODOO CHILD

An enormous adventure through the depths of darkness and despair

This game has nothing to do with goodness or the bright side of religion. *That it's called 2econd Coming*, containing a voodo-entwined hero who can turn into what is essentially a demon, should indicate its intentions: bleakness, despair, evil and darkness—all the right stuff that feeds haunting atmosphere and results in my favorite games.

An entertaining sequel to the underappreciated *Shadow Man*, *2econd Coming* is an enormous trek through the spiritually dead underbelly of such places as Louisiana, Russia, and Ireland, spiralling downward to the underworld of Deadside. While demons slave to resurrect their master and open the gates to Armageddon, Mike LeRoi, an average guy with a cursed gift of turning into the decaying Shadowman at night, gets the call to end the malevolence. Extremely mature and filled with obscure supernatural references, the story plays out extensively as you speak with the inhabitants of the land.

Here is a game that does not heed restraint. Graphic violence accompanies the death of the enemy. Obscenities are constantly tossed around in the spoken dialogue. A mood of dread hangs thick. Its look isn't uplifted by sophistication, but the overall effect of the visual presence is engrossing.

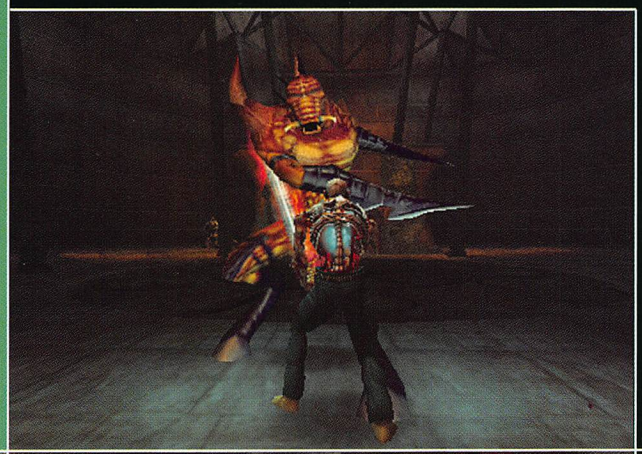
Whether Mike or his altered form is on the trail, the game plays as equal parts action, equal parts adventure and platforming. I played the game with a growing interest becoming increasingly submerged in the shadowy world as the challenge increased and tasks became more interesting.

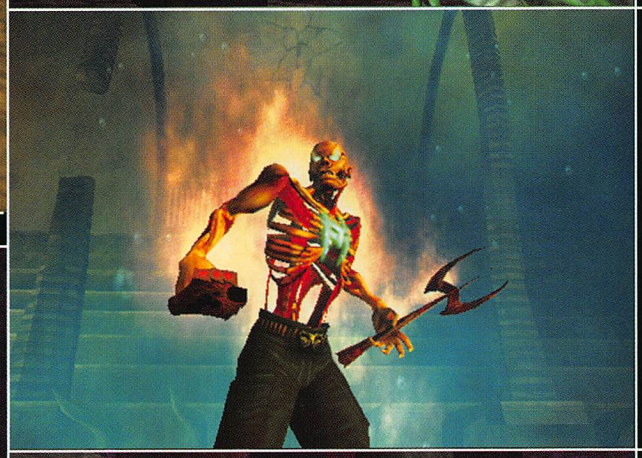
Mike is resourceful: he jumps and climbs and swims, solves puzzles and shoots and pulls levers—all familiar adventure bits. Shadowman, who can be called upon at will once an arcane watch is discovered, is the true badass, his voodoo attributes allowing him to fire destructive magic and breathe underwater.

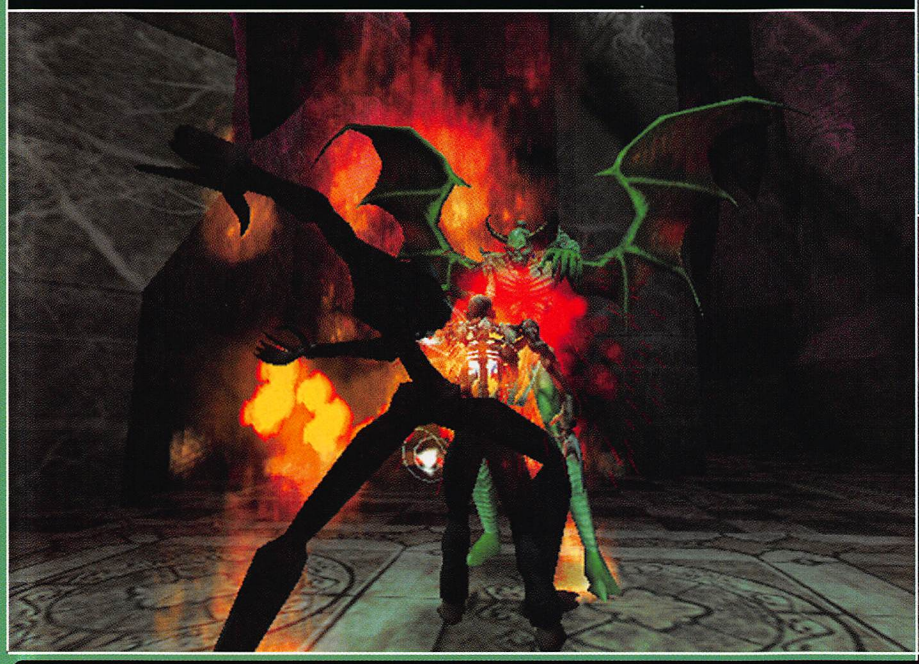
Shadow Man 2econd Coming does intimidate at times with its wide-open expanses of treacherous lands, dank waters, crumbling villages and deep caves. Moving along for hours and covering seemingly boundless space just barely gets the adventure going. I was caught in its delicious darkness till the very end.

BRADY FIECHTER

"THIS IS NOT A GAME THAT HEEDS RESTRAINT."







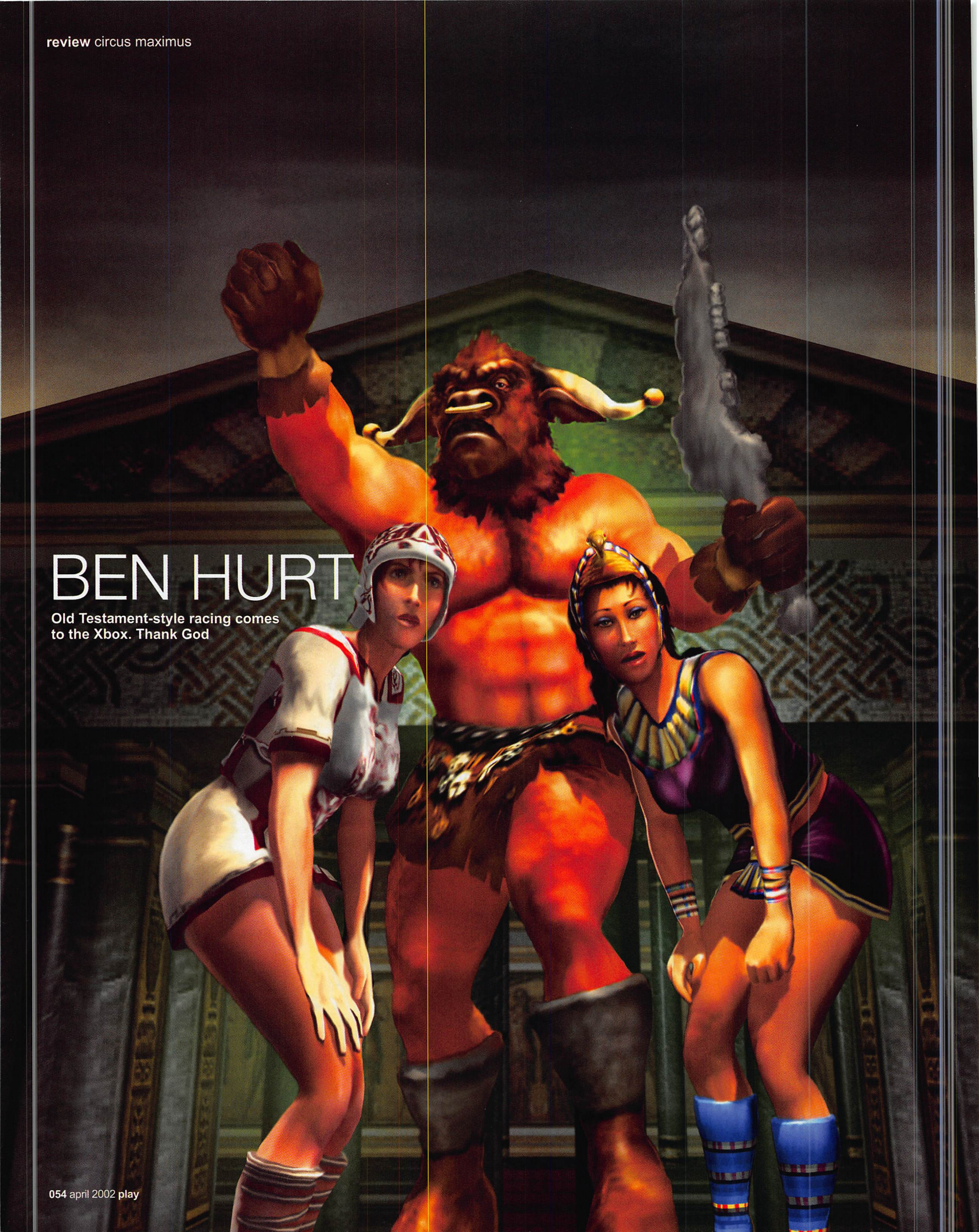
PS2

SHADOWMAN 2econd Coming

play rating ●●●●○

developer: acclaim publisher: acclaim available: now

Shadow Man is one of Acclaim's best kept secrets. If you missed out on the amazing original, it's time you traverse these dark and engaging depths.



BEN HURT

Old Testament-style racing comes to the Xbox. Thank God

And now for something completely different. When I first heard that Kodiak was working on a chariot racing game, I honestly thought it ranked in the nether regions of the bad-idea list. Like most red-blooded Americans, I derive my sense of the blood sport from the classic '60s epic *Ben Hur*, in which Chuck Heston whipped his ponies round and round until he won one for Israel and shoved it right up Caesar's Toga.

Foot wedged in mouth, I am now, to say the least, in awe of the game that's been crafted around this spectacle. Having consumed an entire weekend in which I was supposed to play a pile of games, I can honestly attest that *Circus Maximus* does for racing what Mortal Kombat did for fighting—before it got pimped out like a cheap hooker.

First of all, the racing does not take place on ovals with big golden fish earmarking each painful lap, but on long, winding, ferociously treacherous courses, akin to European Motocross tracks. Set among biblical locales throughout ancient Germania, Egypt, Britannia, Greece, and Rome, the game would do nicely with some bump mapping, yet it's surprisingly well engineered. Channeled through the game's incredibly detailed and well-animated (in all the right places) character models, uncanny sound effects, and simplistic yet effective architecture, there's an air about *Circus Maximus* that gives rise to a sense of "being their" rarely experienced. I found myself immersed in the splendor of the games, rising up through the ranks, racing and killing my way into Caesar's arena.

The racing consists of two simultaneous types of play: driving and attacking. While driving, you manage your speed by reaching a desired pace and then maintain it by whipping your horses sporadically (don't worry, they're polygons) as you slowly lose speed. While cornering, you can lean with a shoulder button or, for even tighter turns, use the right analog to pitch your warrior over the side side-hack style. Combined with the thick galloping of the horses, it's a thrilling dynamic. When you're not watching the track, it's all about fighting off and/or pummeling the competition, who will brutally murder you if you don't. You can also block and duck, although I found it best to just go nuts and bludgeon away. In order to derive maximum pleasure in both of these areas, may I suggest Team Gladiator: Aurora and Gargantus. Not only is Aurora amazing with a mace but at the conclusion of each race, as she celebrates, well, let's just say you won't want to press "A" to continue. And the 400 pound, flubbery, man-titted, hairy beast that is Gargantus is the perfect companion, and he's a surprisingly skilled driver. Once you're up to speed with Gargantus at the helm, you can maintain the pace unattended for quite a while as you tend to other business. In between regions, you participate in Death Matches where the first chariot with five kills wins the day. In these lovely venues, it's not about winning but keeping pace and beating the living hell out of anyone within reach. Only by earning Dinari can you ascend the ranks. So the more you win (and the more you kill), the faster you move towards the ultimate goal of Rome and Circus Maximus, making this not only Russell Crowe's only shot at a video-game franchise (I can imagine the sequel now: Beyond the Grave: Maximus in Circus Maximus), but also the most entertaining alternative racer to come about since the attack and ensuing onslaught of the go-kart.

DAVE HALVERSON

XBOX

CIRCUS MAXIMUS play rating ●●●●●○

developer: kodiak publisher: encore available: now

It's been a long time coming, but someone has finally come up with a way to inject some new life into racing games. Circus Maximus will hopefully grow into a multi-media franchise. I need action figures.

PAC IN CONTROL

You just can't keep a chomping yellow ball with arms and legs down

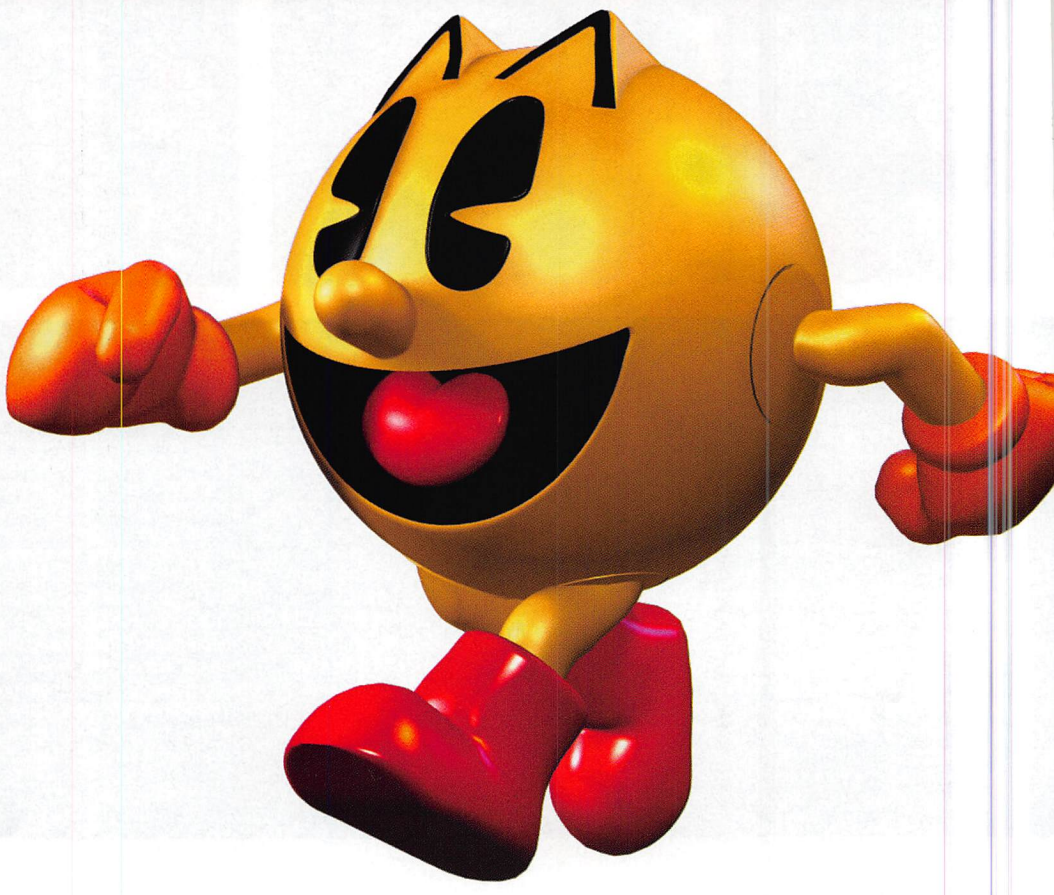
Many years ago— make that 22 years ago— Pac-Man became my epochal introduction to video games. A weighty nostalgia puts me in a very forgiving and affectionate mood when Pac-Man, in any form, gets a console transplant. *Pac-Man World* is the latest—a more-enjoyable-than-it-should-be platformer that is big on collecting and platforming, light on enemy encounters.

Pac-Man World 2 is fairly competent and enjoyable to play, especially for fans of the genre, but the limp appeal of commanding an antiquated Pac-Man through a vividly colorful yet benignly designed world can't be denied. If this is for kids, as the juvenile presentation seems to hint at, they won't respond to a game that exists in this very new and demanding Jak and Daxter universe; if this is a game for the player like myself, its simplicity and lack of invention won't overwhelm.

Initially I felt like I was merely going through the motions, jumping and dodging and collecting to the point of mental shutdown. But the game does pick up dramatically, thanks in large part to some quite engaging platforming; I would have enjoyed the middle to end levels even more if not for the awkward camera. And all that collecting, while feeling a bit purposeless, does grant you sweet reward: every version of Pac-Man since the original can be purchased with accrued tokens in the arcade room.

This game belongs to those gamers who share the same history I do with Pac-Man, and while lacking energetic personality and clever presentation, *Pac-Man World 2* does just enough to entertain on its traditional platforming mechanics alone. But give the industry another year of creative growth and understanding of the importance of the adventure elements in engaging game design—this game is to focused on traveling from point a to b to c rather than opening up a world feel—and it's curtains for the Pac-Man World pack.

BRADY FIECHTER



"...EVERY VERSION OF PAC-MAN SINCE THE ORIGINAL CAN BE PURCHASED WITH ACCRUED TOKENS"

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PAC-MAN WORLD 2

play rating

developer: namco publisher: namco available: now

He's yellow, he's old, but he's back, in a formidable platformer that, depending on your affinity for the man, will rock your world accordingly.

REALLY MEAN STREETS

death and destruction has never been so much fun

The game that occupied our February cover delivers as promised: a title so steeped in cartoon violence and all-out mayhem that it beckons you to forge ahead even when repetition creeps in now and again, which it has a tendency to do as you assail the ranks of the expansive Revolution. Each massive hub, in which you are a slave to the cause, is even bigger than I originally thought, spanning many hours of non-stop bludgeoning—depending on how many do-overs you require, and the amount of time you spend on extra curricular activities. I can't seem to get enough of the way Libra stomps on dead bodies; for you it may be Spanky's head butt. Either way, it's easy to get lost in the crowd, if you know what I mean. But who's complaining? Between the two of them I'm having so much fun shoving it up the corporation's arse, I barely have time to pee. I am also a bit taken back (and pleasantly surprised) by *State*'s level of difficulty. Incorporating search and destroy, contract killing, recon, guard duty, protection, spying, demolition, or a combination thereof, the bevy of missions (ranging in duration from one to ten minutes) often times require careful planning, especially in the later levels as the corporation gets more aggressive and the freedom fighters more demanding.

Overall, it's an engulfing, if not at times overwhelming, game that you'll play for weeks or even months, not unlike Rockstar's last offering, which I'm still playing religiously to this day. The "overwhelming" part? There's something about watching hundreds of panic-stricken poly-people running amok, hour after hour, that gets you a little crazy. When they really start to piss me off, I find that killing a few takes the edge off, especially if you have a butcher knife. Watching their headless bodies thump to the ground just makes your whole day a little brighter. I've barely nicked the Chaos mode (saving it for last), but I already know how intense it is; in fact, that's where the real carnage lies, the Revolution is but a warm up. I'm still not completely clear on how Vis Entertainment did this, but I'm glad they did. With the framework intact and a little room for improvement, with any luck they're working on the sequel right now.

DAVE HALVERSON

PS2

STATE OF EMERGENCY

play rating ●●●●●○

developer: vis entertainment publisher: rockstar available: now

For all of its pure guilty pleasure, and there's alot of it, State of Emergency could do with a bit more diversity... Who am I kidding?! This game is more fun than post-game Laker riot.

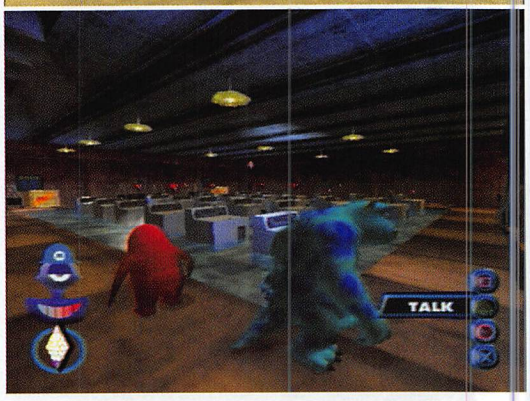
NOT SO SCARY MONSTERS

From Kodiak, makers of the surprising Circus Maximus, comes the PS2 version of Monsters Inc., a license so ransacked, I'm sure Sulley's mug is on a lunchpale somewhere

One can only wonder, once granted the contract on such a huge franchise (and I'm sure a hyphenated development time to go along with it) what that first development meeting must have been like at Kodiak. Do you make a game for kids even though teens and adults seemed to dig the film as much or more? And who should be the operative character, Sulley or Mike? Then of course there's always the question of what kind of game to make, given the framework of the film which, to some extent, must be adhered to. In the end I think they made more right choices than wrong. The overall design of the game—a 3D action-adventure doused with platforming and simplistic puzzle elements—*Monsters Inc.* is put together very well. The textures are good throughout, but the character models are excellent, as is the lighting and voice talent—very important aspects of any movie adaptation. In missions designed around getting Boo out of Monstropolis and back to the bedroom you cover familiar ground, from inside the factory to the innards and outers of the city. Motivated by additional movie clips, the usual collectibles float about, but the main focus is on mostly simple tasks and platforming to unlock the next area. Reaching most of these oft times grizzly milestones, however, usually involves platforming, which Sulley gets through well enough but doesn't seem explicitly designed for. He looks amazing as the operative character, covered in an impressive fuzz texture, but at times he seems a tad big and under-animated for the action at hand. The model just doesn't exhibit enough frames to bring off the game's at-times perilous platforming schemes. The frame rate also takes a slight hit as a result of Sulley's size and complexity. Not that it's all that chuggy; on the contrary, it's at times too fast. The problem is in the pacing, as Sulley tends to lumber.

My preference would have been to make Mike the operative character (or at least playable) but I suppose that would have posed problems of its own, with his fat round body. It would also break from the flow of the film, although, as far as I'm concerned, a movie-to-game adaptation need only feature the locales and characters to hit its mark. Of course, I'm sure Dreamworks probably sees things a bit differently. In the end we are met with a quality movie adaptation that should please the casual gamers it's aimed at, provided they're up for some at times intermediate level platforming. As it stands, even a mediocre *Monsters Inc.* game is bound to scare up some hefty numbers, so this one ought to break the bank.

DAVE HALVERSON



IF A BIG BOOGER WITH ONE EYE AND A FREAKISH BLUE MONSTER CAN'T ENTERTAIN YOU–NOTHING CAN

PS2

MONSTERS INC.

developer: kodiak publisher: scea available: now

play rating

Monsters Inc. barely squeaks out three stars. It's a little short, but the models and overall production make up for it. It's certainly a good movie adaptation.

A BEAUTIFUL BUT FLAWED GAME, DUE TO THE REPETITIOUS NATURE OF THE ACTION

play rating ●●○○○

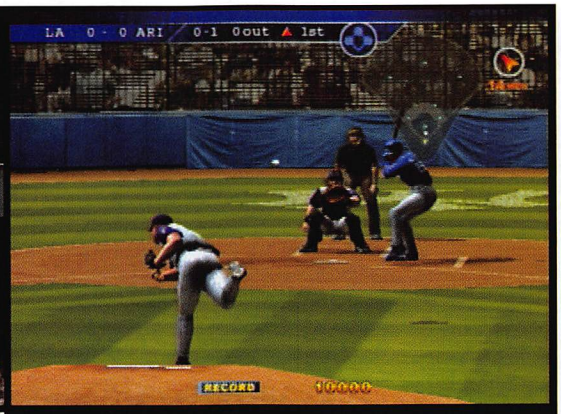
developer: westwood studios
publisher: ea
available: now

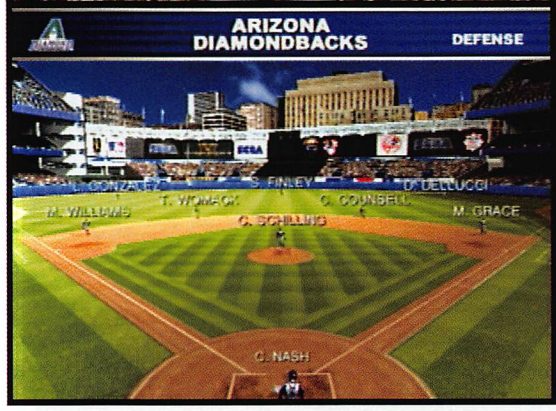
PIRATES THE LEGEND OF BLACK KAT

reviewed by **DAVE HALVERSON**

By land and by sea she does wiggle and bounce, on a quest to avenge the family trust, taking after the fortune and glory her dear mother so vehemently sought. Katarina de Leon, aka "Black Kat," will sail the seas and search every sand dune in pursuit of the evil (even for a pirate) Captain Hawke. Like most beautiful women, she can smell money a mile away and, as a video game heroin, she breathes new life into the strain through a gorgeous in-game model and, we hear, hidden codes to dress her down—way down.

Westwood Studios had a great idea, realizing that an intoxicating theme remained virtually untapped they set out to create an action adventure that would raise every gamer's mast. A pirate adventure starring a steamy female lead drenched in scenic skylines and the romance of the sea—what's not to love? Well, almost nothing, besides the fact that the game is in serious need of diversity—namely, some platforming and/or puzzle elements. While it does change subtly in execution as you unearth weapons and spells, the action is just too repetitive. Kat runs, and runs, and runs, and slashes and hacks, and hacks, and on and on. It's nice to look at, but draining to play. The sea battles, set among some truly jaw- dropping visuals, are also engaging, especially as you amass bigger, more powerful ships, but in order to assail their ranks, you must partake in too many often lengthy battles. Both concepts are solid on the surface, but over time they begin to wear you down. I will say this, though: as a franchise, this game has eminent promise.





"THE ONLY BASEBALL YOU'LL EVER NEED... UNTIL NEXT YEAR. SEGA SPORTS PITCHES ANOTHER WINNER."

play rating ●●●●○

developer: sega
publisher: sega
available: march

HOME RUN KING

reviewed by **DAVE HALVERSON**

The Sega Sports tradition of excellence lives on, making its way onto the GameCube with a user-friendly baseball game that may just conjure up that old Tommy Lasorda feeling. *Home Run King*'s secret lies in its easy to assimilate control mechanism and killer visuals. Jumping in, sans manual (as most people do), the initial gameplay is a snap and if it happens to be raining or night, you won't believe the realism. But any arcade baseball game is only as good as its depth once you get passed the surface play, and it is here where *HRK* really delivers. Fully licensed by Major League Baseball, every team, stadium, and player is not only represented but you can assimilate any one of them with the game's Create-A-Player tool, which lets you map your attributes of choice onto any player, or an entire team. You can sit there for half a day just cooking up players. When you do come to bat, you'll notice the eerily realistic faces on the models peering at you, each with their trademark stance and batting style. Kinda creepy. The one thing that kind of threw me about *HRK* was the depth of field in the outfield, which seemed kind of disproportionate to the real thing, but maybe it's just me. Otherwise this is all the baseball you'll ever need, until next year.

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

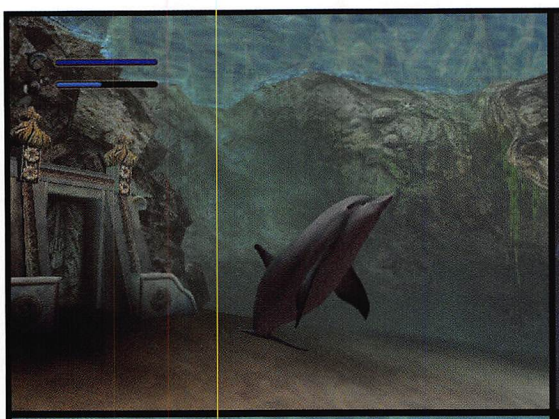
reviewed by BRADY FIECHTER

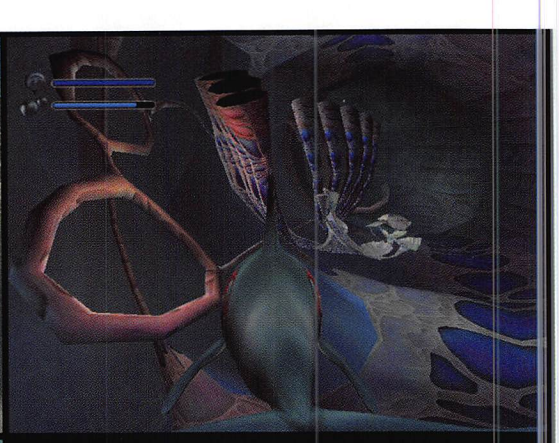
Beautifully serene and even evoking a bit of wonder, *Eco the Dolphin* grabbed me in a way few games ever have. A large part of its appeal is the wonderful atmosphere. Swimming through the seemingly endless sea as a dolphin is truly unique and fantastically involving, and interacting with the elegant creatures that inhabit the waters contains a rare appeal.

The story revolves around Ecco and his heroic place within a dying universe. Humans and dolphins have existed as essentially equal beings, and now one dolphin will be the savior. His mode of attack is a powerful thrust, and various songs can be learned for defense and enemy manipulation. Most obstacles can be overcome not with force, but with cunning and quick thinking.

This game is daunting. Some of you will hate it for the reasons I love it: enormously complex exploration, a gentle theme with spiritual grounding, the unassuming presence of a dolphin as the hero who isn't armed with missile launchers and assault rifles.

I got lost a lot. The game could be frustrating and disorienting, with the sea bed providing inadequate landmarks to get good bearings. I often wasn't quite sure what the exact objective was, mistakingly talking to the same creature over and over who looks just like all the rest. And then I'd complete a task, save a friend, always compelled to continue on.





"ECCO IS A SURREAL, CALMING GAME–FRUSTRATING AT TIMES–BUT WHOLLY REWARDING"

PS2

play rating

developer: appaloosa
publisher: acclaim
available: now

EVE OF EXTINCTION

reviewed by BRADY FIECHTER

Dipping into the Final Fight-Double Dragon-Streets of Rage deepfreeze, *Eve of Extinction* pulls out the typically purfunctory gameplay premise: countless thugs wait in every corner of the screen, at all times, spilling out until your fingers are numb from basic combos and the level ends. But what saves it from being dragged down by the monotony that sets in toward the game's middle are the heavy adventure elements that make this far more than a constricted beat-um-up. The levels are huge and open, designed for engaging, demanding platforming, and there is an awesome freedom for exploration. Contained in an coldly antiseptic, muted future, the action moves upwards as far as it does outwards – climb to the tops of buildings, leap across fire escapes, ascend delapidated staircases.

Stringing together combo attacks and reaching all the ledges, beams and poles that get you to the next shutter or key-encoded door often require skillfully utilizing the energized weapons you acquire from boss encounters—catapulting for extended jumps, taking out barriers with special attacks that are released by collecting pockets of energy, uniqely switching between weapons midstream for increased effectiveness. Now, if Yukes would have had the sense to tone down the enemy encoutners—it's tough to pull off a consistently engaging combat system when battles are so incessant and play out across so much terrain—*Eve of Extinction* could have been better than merely good.

BEAT DOWN THE CORPORATION IN A STYLIZED MATRIX-STYLE ADVENTURE MADE PALLATABLE BY THE TALENTED TEAM AT YUKES

PS2

play rating

developer: yukes
publisher: eidos
available: now

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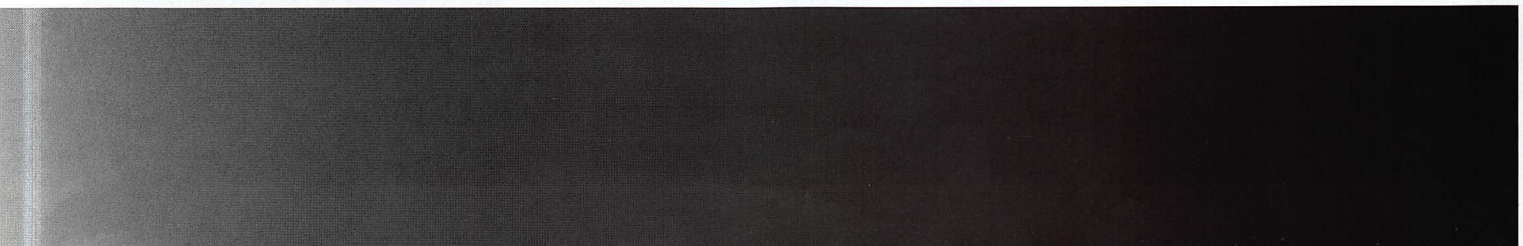


mini reviews

NIGHTCASTER

play rating ●●●○○

developer: vr1 ent.
publisher: microsoft
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

How do you make a classic action-adventure game stand out in the crowd? My money is always on platforming elements, but with *Nightcaster*, the designers opted for color-coded enemies and spells, which is actually quite effective. If only it wasn't meant to hold up the entire game, we might have a franchise on our hands. Hell, we still may. Repetition aside—and there's lots of it—this is like those Neo Geo games of old where it's so beautiful you just deal with it to see the next level. Making it my late-night snack, I stuck with it to the very end, chipping away a few hours at a time, and I'm glad I did: it's a beautiful game. Platforming elements would have Nightcaster a truly memorable experience. Perhaps he will rise again.

SMASHING DRIVE

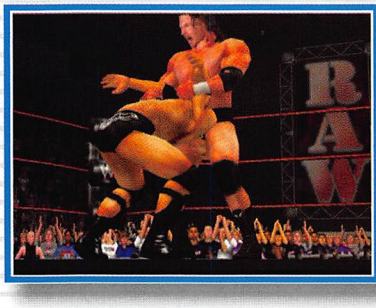
play rating ●○○○○

developer: point of view
publisher: namco
available: now

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

We drew straws to see who'd get the honor of reviewing Smashing Drive and, well, nuff said. Its hot-potato status is due to the fact that we all respect the Namco name so much. Placed on a pedestal with the likes of Konami and Capcom, it's hard to believe it's their name on the box. It's like they lost a bet or something. In a nutshell: N64 graphics at 60-frames, gameplay that makes SF Rush seem almost desirable, and a soundtrack so preposterous I forgot the Mazda zoom-zoom jingle for almost a full minute.



WWF RAW

play rating ●●○○○

developer: anchor inc.
publisher: thq
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by STEVE THOMASON

I hate to be the bearer of bad news for WWF fans, but *Raw* falls well short of expectations. Many of you probably had high hopes for Anchor Inc.'s take on the world of sports entertainment, but the end product feels rushed and is sorely lacking depth.

The most glaring omission is the absence of a story mode. This wouldn't be such a big deal if the game possessed a wide variety of match types, but the selection here is the most limited in recent memory. There are no ladder matches, no cage matches, and the lackluster AI renders even tag-team battles almost unplayable. The create-a-superstar feature is also relatively shallow, and fails to live up to the high standards set by *SmackDown*.

SILENT HILL 2

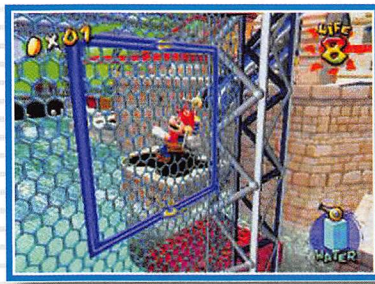
play rating ●●●●●

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

The poster-child for the modern video game, *Silent Hill 2*, with all its dreary subtext and grotesque beasts, is the closest we've come to a truly interactive experience so far in the evolution of the video game. On the Xbox, this game comes to gruesome life with lighting effects and shadows that pull you into the story whether you want in or not, and a level of detail never before seen. The ambience makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up, and with enhanced graphics, Dolby Digital, new areas, and Maria as a playable character on Xbox, this is the gold standard for adventure horror.



MARIO SUNSHINE

play rating ●●●●●

developer: nintendo
publisher: nintendo
available: april 1

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

reviewed by PETER GARDEN

What we all hoped for turned out to be true: *Mario Sunshine* can easily rank as one of the greatest games ever made, perhaps topping the list. Far more revolutionary than we could have ever dreamed, this game is as different from *Super Mario 64* as that game was to the original *Super Mario Bros.* There are ideas on display here that make every other 3D game look stale, and the simple feeling of playing the game is almost beyond description. If you thought the GameCube controller was good, wait until you experience how it feels when playing *Mario Sunshine*. You will become one with this game. Look for Miyamoto's latest masterpiece to be released in the states on April 1.

NBA 2K2

play rating ●●●●●

developer: visual concepts
publisher: sega
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

Forgive me but, without sounding too kiss ass, I have to say, VC's basketball game is by leaps and bounds the best you can buy today, and on Xbox it shines its brightest. Leaving the laundry list of features–like real time offensive and defensive playbooks, the new stealing system, and a myriad of refinements–to the manual, I'll cut right to to the meat and just say that 2K2 is huge fun to play, whether you're playing for the first time or a seasoned sports game vet. The depth of control (and functionality–you can tweak the camera any way you like, for instance) is truly staggering, continually registering the more you play, and visually you really can't ask for much more. This is the basketball game to own. Spectacular.

NHL 2K2

play rating ●●●●●

developer: visual concepts
publisher: sega
available: now

Dreamcast

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

Dubbed by the in-game announcer as "the coolest game on Earth," I wouldn't go quite that far, but VC's last sports offering for the Dreamcast may just be the best hockey game on Earth, so far at least. It's easy to forget how powerful a system the Dreamcast was, until you put in a game like this and witness the in game models–detailed down to the blades on their skates. The flat yet bustling crowd is equally up for the last blast on Dreamcast. Mostly though, *NHL 2K2* is about choices and control; choices in the camera angles, fully updated 2001-2002 rosters and interactive replays, and control derived from smooth animation, realistic-feeling ice, and a user-friendly control scheme. Basically, it's all here, with looks that kill and gameplay to support it.

MR. MOSQUITO

play rating ●●●●●

developer: scei
publisher: eidos/fresh games
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by PETER GARDEN

How much is uniqueness worth in terms of stars? I reckon a totally unique concept is worth at least two stars. A unique concept that is also fun to play, well that earns it another star. Which means that *Mr. Mosquito* gets three stars. Flying around as a little robotic mosquito sucking blood from the Yamada family (who will squash you if your reflexes are not fast enough) is an exercise is strangeness and quirky appeal. If only the game were a bit longer and the graphics better. That would earn it a fourth star.

UFC

play rating ●●●●●

developer: crave
publisher: crave
available: now

XBOX

reviewed by SHANE REED

We couldn't find anyone into UFC brawling enough to intelligently analyze this game. So I did what any good game reviewer would: brushed over the manual, slapped it in, picked the coolest looking fighter (this was nearly impossible) and went for it. First of all, I can't tell how totally creeped out I am by a select screen covered with near naked men so real looking you can see their pit hair, who all a look like there a Skoal can away from a Springer episode. That said, hey, if you're into this UFC thing, your sport has a great game under it's, uh, tight underwear. Flawless models, shameless entrances, and moves so real… you can smell the sweat! Depending on how big a fan you actually are go ahead and tack stars onto my score accordingly.

MAD MAESTRO

play rating ●●●●●

developer: scei
publisher: eidos/fresh games
available: now

PS2

reviewed by PETER GARDEN

Having the genre unto itself, *Mad Maestro* is the first music conducting game to reach the States, and it's a fun little game. Follow the timing cues as you rotate around a diamond pattern in the middle of the screen, using varying degrees of analog pressure to conduct the orchestra, playing an assortment of classical music. Like all music games, timing is everything, and you've got to keep the right tempo and loudness to keep the music sounding right. It's a little difficult at first, as using the analog buttons properly takes some doing, but it soon feels natural. If classical music is not your thing, however, you may tire of this.

MEGAMAN ZERO

Finally, *Mega Man* has come to his senses. Well, actually, in *Mega Man Zero*, the blue-blotted robot boy isn't the starring hero. Instead, his do-gooder partner has been adopted as the headlining character. But this game is historic, regardless of the playable character, seeing as it is the first in a long series of handheld Mega Man adventures to be *truly*, 100% original. Everything else released to date has been broken up renditions of previous console titles. *Zero* is also unique for another distinct reason, being the brand-new Admiration System, a data collection scheme that records the amount of enemies that you've destroyed, how many special items you've used, how much energy you've lost, and the time involved in completing each level. Later, after all the battle info has been logged, you'll be able to compare and contrast in a multi-player linkup, ultimately proving whom the most talented Mega Man player is. Sure, it may not be the most provocative update to this Capcom franchise, but I'm just happy that the GBA will host the first original handheld romp for one of my most favorite side-scrollers this side of video games.

preview

developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: summer

previewed by JON GIBSON

TOP GUN

The coolest Tom Cruise has ever been was in the '80s phenom, *Top Gun*. It took 16 years for gaming to find Maverick, Goose and the Iceman, but the time is nigh. On the GBA, Titus promises great graphics to include realistic clouds, explosions, smoke, and afterburner fx, along with 12 unique missions covering arctic, ocean, forest and desert landscapes. All totalled, players will fly 4 aircraft and use 3 weapon types in the 1-player game. *Top Gun Advance* also features two-player death match: air-to air combat amidst open arenas, canyons, etc., provided you have two carts. And since Michael Ironside won't be there to wet nurse you, numerous cuts have been generously added. All we need now is the Ninja, and it's off to the danger zone!

preview

developer: titus
publisher: titus
available: june

previewed by BRADY FIECHTER

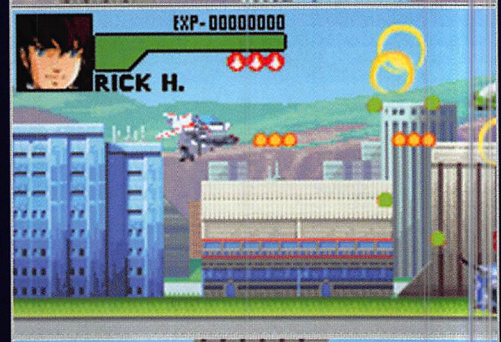
DOWNFORCE

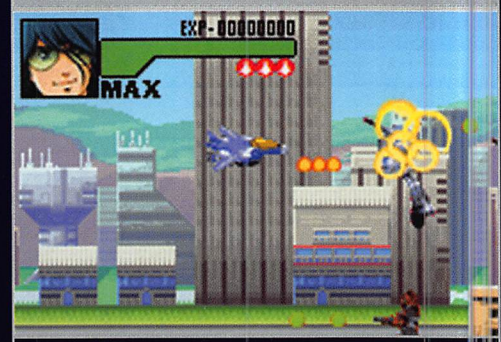
You, the very intelligent and widely informed gamer, have viewed these screen shots, deducing that this is a racing game. But what you might not know is that it incorporates a Mode-7-like effect to replicate the polygonal *Downforce*'s big brother will be showcasing on Xbox. Here we get the typical modes of play: Free Race, Championship, Time Attack and Arcade Trophy. For the extra incentive to master your racing technique, four of the ten available cars are unlocked. Also locked at the game's start are two of the fourteen outdoor tracks, which offer two distinct paths to the finish. Focusing on exaggerated speed and aggressive racing, *Downforce* will fill an open spot on GBA.

developer: titus
publisher: titus
available: tba

previewed by BRADY FIECHTER

ROBOTECH





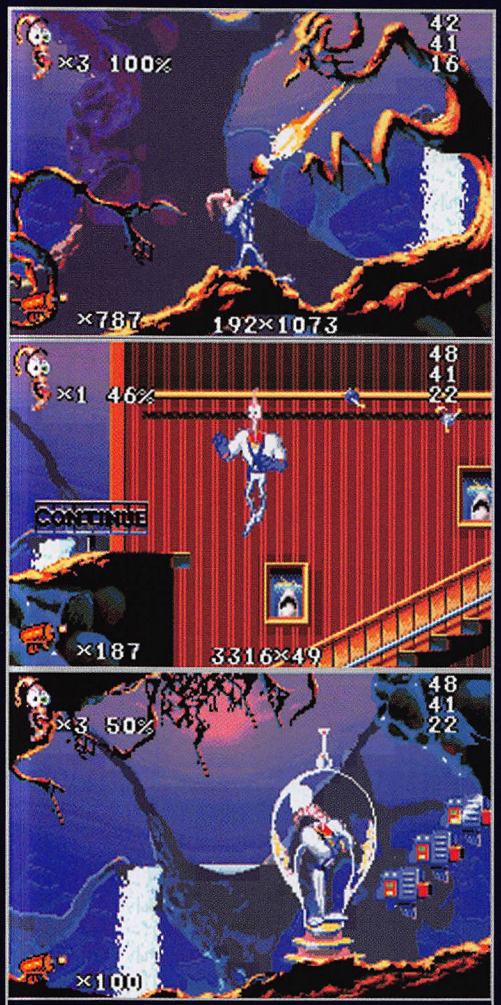
Robotech, the animated epic that launched the transforming robot craze back in 1985, is finally landing on a video-game console near you. After earning the crown for the single most delayed game in N64 history (it never did come out), the United Earth Government and all of its drama (and hardware!) are targeting every major consoles over the next year or so, courtesy of TDK, beginning with the GBA. The game, which is being developed by Lucky Chicken, lets you climb into the cockpit of the Veritech Valkyrie—the transformable fighter that combines the aerial grace of an F-14 with the firepower of an armored division—and partake in a side-scrolling action shooter against the invading Zentraedi alien forces. It's every boy's dream! The Kentucky fried developers promise a game that will knock your moon boots off, whether you're a fan or not.

preview

developer: lucky chicken
publisher: tdk mediactive
available: summer

previewed by BRADY FIECHTER

EARTHWORM JIM 2



Majesco gets another kick at the can with *Earth Worm Jim 2*, their latest in a growing line of GBA games—some great, some not so good. Among the not-so-good lies the original EWJ, which, in my estimation, deserves a remix with all of the animation intact. One can only hope and pray that EWJ 2 fares better under their tenure. Shiny's sequel, their last game with the original dream team intact (hello Nick, Nick, Mike, and Ted, wherever you are), we find our fine not-feathered friend scampering across barbecue grills, shooting his way through the Earth's crust, and swimming among the globule as a fetal newt with a gun on his foot. Special? It rules completely. Let's all have a group prayer now that it's identical or better than the 16-bit original.

preview

developer: majesco
publisher: majesco
available: tba

by DAVE HALVERSON

GUILTY GEAR X: AE

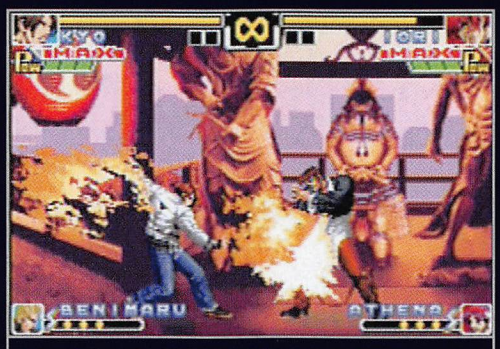
All 14 characters from the most gorgeously animated fighting game ever devised are making the trip to the diminutive yet able land of the small screen, in *Guilty Gear X: Advance Edition*. The little-known fighter found its bad self marooned on the Dreamcast after a low profile stint in the post-Street Fighter arcades and the big fighting craze of the last century, never amassing the huge following it so rightfully deserves. One can only hope that Sammy can somehow cram all of the amazing animation and personality into the GBA's willing shell and give *Guilty Gear* its day in the sun. We'll find out soon enough; the game's set for a May 2002 liftoff.

preview

developer: sammy
publisher: sammy
available: april

by DAVE HALVERSON

KING OF FIGHTERS EX



Yanked from the SNK titty, *King of Fighters* is now in the hands of Marvelous Entertainment, whoever the hey that is. Let's just hope they're name is indicative of their games, because this is precious cargo. The game, which looks pretty spectacular I must say, is said to push the limits of the GBA and sports the two-player link function, so two people can squint at the GBA until they go blind, wishing Nintendo would release a friggin' back-lit version. Titled *KoF EX: Neo Blood*, the story follows our band of 24 ass kickers through further adventures in the KoF tournament.

preview

developer: marvelous ent.
publisher: sammy
available: may

by DAVE HALVERSON

MINORITY REPORT

As summer approaches, a slew of blockbuster movie adaptations will be spun into interactive adventures. But one of the more promising is *Minority Report*, based directly on Steven Spielberg's latest sci-fi epic. The film follows pre-crime officer, John Anderton (Tom Cruise), who is enlisted by the military to convict felons before they commit their crimes (rooted in futuristic, genetic code tech). But when he's targeted for elimination, there's nothing else to do but run. In third-person, players battle through 10 stages of Blade Runner-esque environments, utilizing hand-to-hand combat skills along with a range of artillery-Gel and Vortex rifles, along with Flash grenades, the choice selections. Enemies range from your ex-military co-workers and other humans to robotic foes. You'll also be able to call upon gadgets to do your bidding, like Hoverbots, allowing you to search areas for hidden pockets of ammo, health packs and shields that are otherwise unreachable. Holographic Mirrors, used to project an artificial image, thus confusing enemies, can also be employed. From this first glimpse, *Minority Report* is gearing up to be a genuine hit in both cinematic and interactive territories.

preview

developer: activision
publisher: activision
available: june

by JON GIBSON

PUYO POP

Will we be playing these types of games forever? I certainly wouldn't mind, for I never tire of them, and *Puyo Puyo* is one of my favorites. The play is delightfully simple. Match four colors of little jellies (they have eyes so I guess they're alive), and they disappear. Sounds stupid, right? Well it's not. By rotating the falling pair in various directions, you can set up these vast, intricate combos, which is as satisfying as just about any other action in a video game. Typical *Puyo Puyo* features abound in this GBA game, like story mode, head to head (with one cartridge), and single player puzzle challenges. The perfect desert island game.

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

developer: sonic team
publisher: thq
available: now

reviewed by TIMOTHY PIKE

ARCADE ADVANCED

Ah, the sweet twinge of nostalgia. It was thick with this one, Konami's Arcade Advanced. Presented for your regression therapy are *Gyruss, Time Pilot, Rush'n Attack, Yie Ar Kung Fu, Scramble*, and Frogger. You don't need me to tell you if this is a good collection or not, because it all has to do with your own memories and fondness for these old games. I will always remember playing *Gyruss* at the local mall's darkened arcade back in the day, tripping out on the then-amazing 3D gameplay and classical music. And I always remember *Time Pilot* from *Starcade*, an '80s gameshow hosted by Wink Martindale where contestants would play games for prizes. Remember that one? If you do, well, then you are as old as I am.

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now

reviewed by PETER GARDEN

PLANET OF THE APES

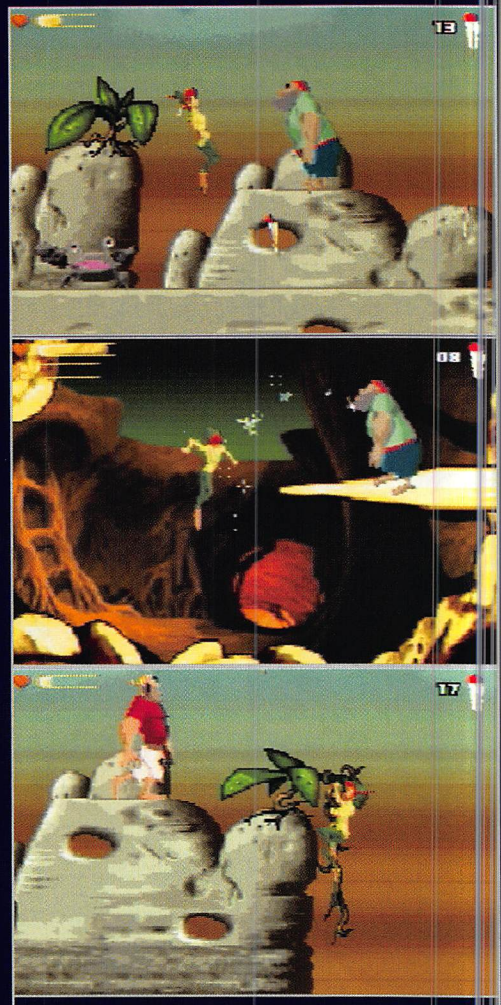
Pimpin' out the Apes license has proven no easy task. The PS2 game–in development long before the movie was a twinkle in Tim Burton's eye–lies in development purgatory, and behind Ubi's GBA game not a creature is stirring, not even a human in really good monkey makeup. This game, crafted by happy Melbourne Australia developer Torus Games (*Jackie Chan GBA, Spiderman GBC, Yoda Stories* GBC) is your classic *Out of This World/Prince of Persia* type adventure, in which Ben returns to the monkey laden planet to look for signs of his missing ally Taylor. Within its confines you'll find swell animation, lovely backgrounds, and enough classic start and stop gameplay to choke a donkey. The question you need to ask yourself is do you care? Even if you like the strain certain key elements are missing like being able to role or draw your weapon on the run, some type of walk, and the ability to define an edge. Ben drops into the abyss from mid-platform all too often. The *Ape* AI borders on well, ape, and any real sense of the film you'd hoped the game would be based on is not to be found. Graphics and sound it has, but fun is in short supply.

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

developer: torus games
publisher: ubi soft
available: now

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

PETER PAN



Complete with actual clips from the film hidden within, Peter Pan is flying again, this time on Game Boy Advance, in *Return to Neverland*. Through some insane video compression technology, you can unlock and view actual footage from the film, which hits theatres in mid February—a great gimmick obviously intended to get little Jimmy to drive Mum nuts until she drags him to the cinema, but there's a good game in the box too. Somewhat reminiscent of the Genesis classic Alladdin, Peter doesn't possess the same precise movement, but the animation and overall level design, which switches between flying with Tink and traditional platforming made better by Peter's ability to float, are on par with Disney's best 2D offerings. I'm surprised that Disney allows pirates to shoot at our fairy friend armed with only a boomerang, but pirates are mangy scum and have always depicted as such in Disney lore. It's good to see them sticking to there, um, guns.

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

developer: disney interactive
publisher: disney interactive
available: now

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

DARK ARENA

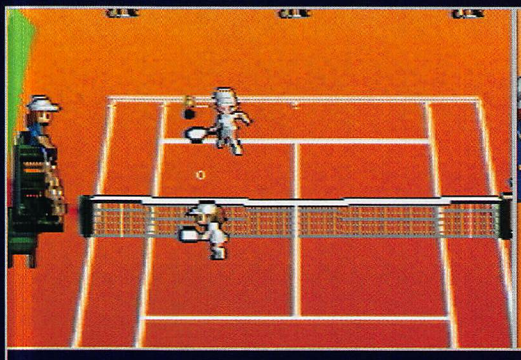
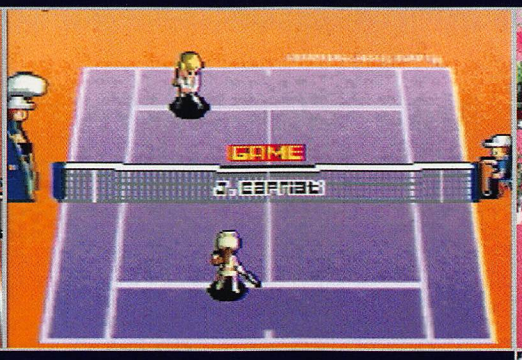
Let's talk FPS. The idea of having a full-on, first-person actioner in the comfort of your palm-sized game machine is novel, to say the least. But the genre is still evolving—and probably won't be perfected for several years—so, in the meantime, there's this flawed, but enjoyable little ditty, *Dark Arena*. Ironically, this was supposed to be the inaugural FPS shooter on the GBA (yet several titles beat it to the punch), and that is where Graphic State's design ultimately falls short. It doesn't feel much different than id's *Doom*, featuring similarly murky settings and hellish environments (though, *Dark Arena* does offer brighter resolution, making gameplay easier on the eyes). Plus, the animation leaves something to be desired; enemies perish in a choppy, two-frame fallback (it's always the same) and explosions are less than extraordinary. The progressive challenge of bosses and enemies is impressive, though, as well as the fairly complex level construction and unlimited ammo feature for the pistol (which comes in quite handy). When compared to other titles on the market, this is still a solid, 20-level romp that should be treated as a quasi-sequel to *Doom*.

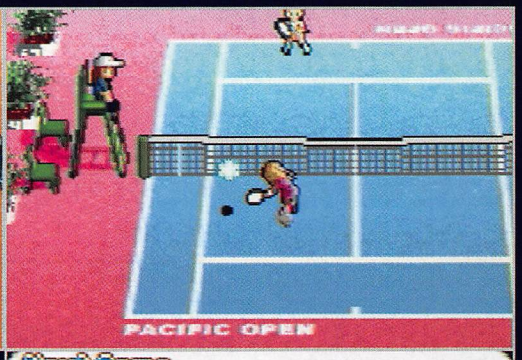
play rating ●●●○○

developer: majesco
publisher: majesco
available: now

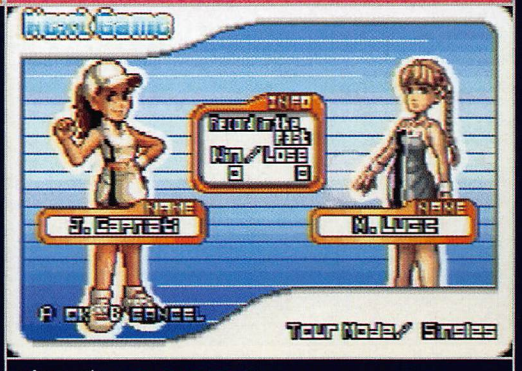
reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

WTA TENNIS



With all of the realistic tennis going around these days (nice, isn't it), it's easy to forget the game that started it all: simply entitled *Tennis*, a first-party Nintendo game available for the NES at launch, which seems an eternity ago from where we stand today. In the spirit of that wonderful game, Konami has crafted their *WTA Tour* tennis game for the Game Boy Advance, and the framework is none the worse for the wear. All dressed up and everywhere to go, the game features all of the prowess allowed by improved technology: better physics, graphics, sound and control, while keeping it real with simple, fun, back-and-fourth tennis action—only harder…much harder. This game's no cakewalk. The girls aren't looking to shapely on the small screen, but they are incredibly well detailed and animated for their size, and besides the absent Williams sister (Venus) and Anna K., they're all here. Maybe the Davenport sprite was so big they couldn't all fit! I'm kidding; Lindsay's a rocker.



play rating ●●●●○

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

OGRE THE TOP

Quest brings their classic series to the best handheld ever made. Sounds good.

Quest has got quite a good thing going with their Ogre Battle games. Highly regarded by all who play them, Ogre Battle, and its spin-off, Tactics Ogre, have enamored console strategy fans since the Super Famicom. The reasons are simple. One, the games are fun, and two, each game has been developed with the greatest care and passion for the art. Indeed, I place Quest in the top ten developers. They have an attention for detail and an understanding for what they are trying to achieve that is rivaled only by Namco and Nintendo.

So in other words, it's rather good news that there is another Tactics Ogre game. This time it's on Game Boy Advance, and what a wonderful system to host this fun and rewarding strategy game.

Those unfamiliar with Quest's Ogre games may be familiar with Final Fantasy Tactics, a game which was developed by a former member of Quest. Tactics Ogre is roughly like that game. You move your group of characters one at a time in a little isometric environment, using ranged and close-up attacks on the enemy. This action is turn-based, allowing for careful thought and deep strategic planning. Outside the battles, you can change the class of your characters, equip new weapons and armor, and generally lose yourself in the minutiae of managing your team. This is classic Tactics Ogre. And this one features a great little story, a long quest, and the ability to exchange rare items found in Quest mode with other GBA players through the link cable.

As expected, the game looks great on GBA, with fantastic detail, rich colors, and the oh-so-cute little characters that are synonymous with Quest games.

If you've never played a Quest game (and let's face it, not many in this country have), this is an awesome chance to find out why they're so great. Though I slightly prefer the Ogre Battle games with their multi-troop system and less intricate battles, Tactics is the next best thing.

MICHAEL HOBBS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

TACTICS OGRE: THE KNIGHT OF LODIS

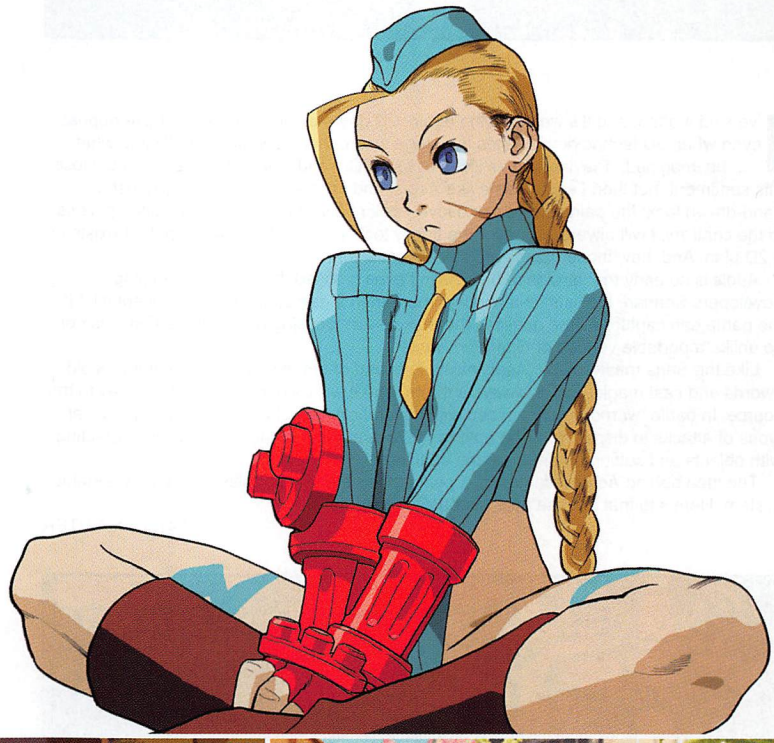
play rating

developer: quest publisher: atlus available: now

What a great series, and it has found a perfect home on the Game Boy Advance. It's a match made in heaven. Stock up on batteries.

STREETS OF RAGE

After a brief intermission, 2D street fighting is about to come back



Why is the Game Boy Advance so freaking awesome? Because you get to play Capcom gems like classic *Final Fight* and, soon, one of the best Street Fighters in an endless and indomitable series, *Street Fighter Alpha 3*.

So you get the preserved console powerhouse 2D fighter on a portable system: fluid animation, 33 characters to battle with, three different fighting styles for all the combatants ("isms"), beautifully drawn backdrops, grandly conceived gameplay. It's *Street Fighter* for those times that the TV is not available, and this is only a good thing.

A few new, extremely capable fighters will be making the roadtrip, including Yun, Maki, and Eagle, who originated on *Capcom vs. SNK 2*. Of course, *Street Fighter* must be played with a friend; Capcom wisely included link-up play for civilized two-player competition. A few more goodies will be locked into *Street Fighter Alpha 3*: play it, love it, find them for yourself.

BRADY FIECHTER

GAME BOY ADVANCE

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 | preview

developer: capcom publisher: capcom available:may

Arguably the best game in the series, Street Fighter Alpha 3 looks almost too good to be true in its new, smaller size.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

A rich design style recalls the brilliant appeal of the Saturn classic *Guardian Heroes*

I've said it often, and it's worth saying again: 2D game design will always have appeal, even when 3D technology reaches the stage where there is virtually no limit to what can be imagined. Playing games like *Devil May Cry* and *Jak and Daxter*, I almost lose this sentiment, but then I see a game like *Aegis*, and I remember why I still cherish a hand-drawn look: the painted tones and lovely colors still captivate. And despite opinions to the contrary, I will always argue for the tightly locked character movement that exists on a 2D plan. And, hey, these games are still essential fun.

Aegis is so early that a release date hasn't even crossed the minds of fledgling developers Sennari. It exists as a concept more than a game, but what a concept it is! If the game can capture all the qualities the makers are focusing on, what we'll have is not so unlike a portable version of *Guardian Heroes*.

Like the Sega masterpiece, *Aegis* exists in a land of fantasy, where inhabitants wield swords and cast magic. Evil is always a threat, and it will be our job to fight our way to the source. In battle, warriors will be faced with several classes of enemy, requiring several types of attacks to dispel. You'll be able to move in and out of the field of play, interacting with objects and setting up defense and attacks.

The idea behind *Aegis* is fantastic, a perfect theme and gameplay arena for a portable system. Here's to that release date materializing soon.

BRADY FIECHTER

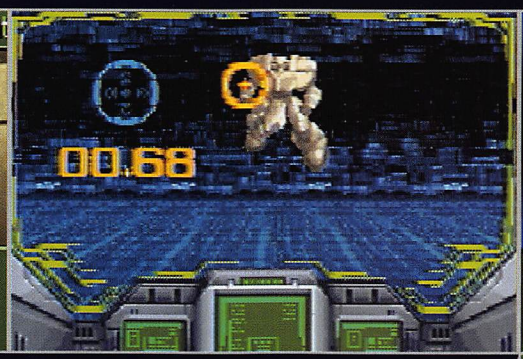
GAME BOY ADVANCE

AEGIS preview

developer: sennari publisher: tba available: tba

Seeing *Aegis* and receiving a detailed demonstration of the concepts building the game, visions o *Guardian Heroes* kept popping up.

ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE FIST OF MARS



Any long-time Konami fan surely remembers the days of *Policenauts*, when a game you watched and read more then played–in the conventional sense of the word–could captivate as much as any shooter or action game of the day. In a return to that golden era, Konami offers *Zone of the Enders: The Fist of Mars* for the Game Boy Advance. Unlike *Policenauts*, or the original saga, this game, continuing from the PS2 game, rides on an action/strategy framework, pitting Cage against the Martian Military and their attempt to invade Mars and its human colonies. This time out Cage commands entire troops, including ground and air forces, after being hurled into space after taking refuge in Testament an unregistered LEV (laborious Extra-Orbital Vehicle) with a mysterious girl Myona, when their transport falls under surprise attack. When the game's sparkling dialogue isn't entrancing you–the audio is spectacular–the strategy skirmishes deliver in droves, via an original concept, using 3D targeting, long, short, ground, and air attacks along with animated cut scenes and, of course, heated verbal exchanges. *The Fist of Mars* is a more than welcome breath of fresh air on the GBA, and it shows that Konami is committed to the franchise which I think holds more promise than anything else in their arsenal, sans *Castlevania*.

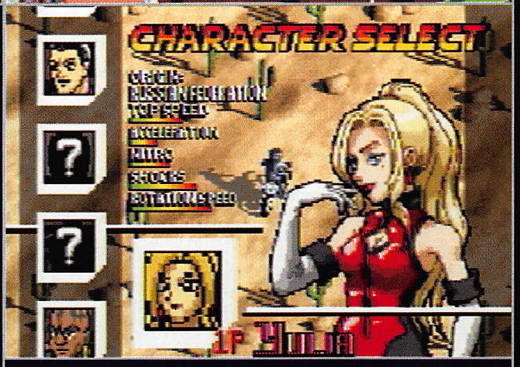
play rating ●●●●●

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

MOTOCROSS MANIACS ADVANCED

Anyone who reveled in the joy of the NES *Excitebike* and the original *Motocross Maniacs* will undoubtedly love this update. *MM Advance* plays off the original–with added depth, and a generous audio-video 2D punch–fueled by way of the pint-sized power of the GBA. Championship Mode (broken down into six cups: Crystal Topaz, Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald, and Diamond) features the tried and true formula—grabbing gas, nitros and assorted power-ups to keep you motoring as you fly, spin, and jam your way over jumps, around loops, and down straights. And in the newly added Action mode, you can roll over zombies, jet through labs, and play bomb tag. Attack mode lets you run wild in Point and Time runs, and if you dare, you can link up for some truly manic two- to four-player action. *MM Advance* is a meaty update of a truly addictive classic. Old-school twitch gaming at its finest.



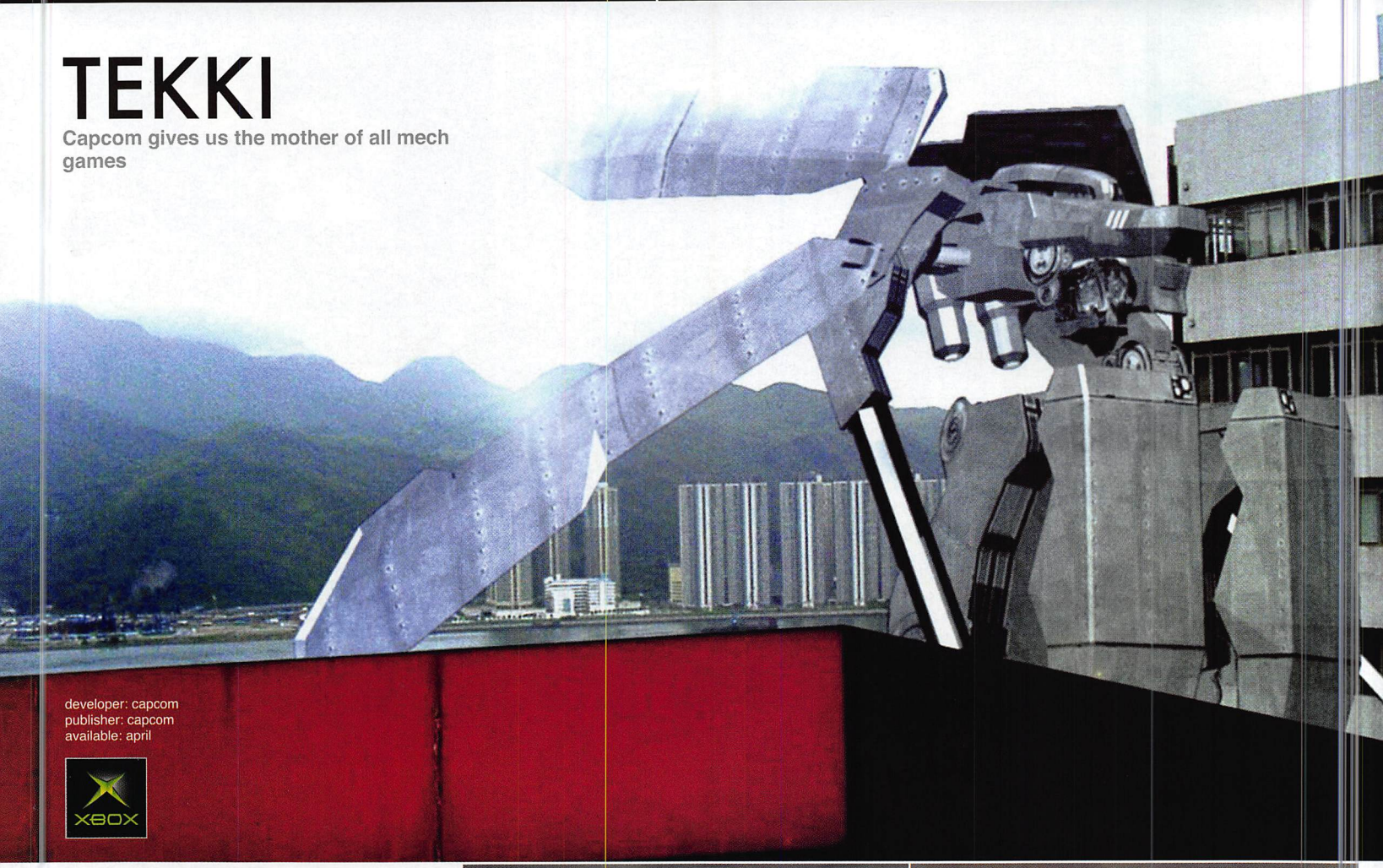
play rating ●●●●●

developer: konami
publisher: konami
available: now

reviewed by DAVE HALVERSON

TEKKI

Capcom gives us the mother of all mech games



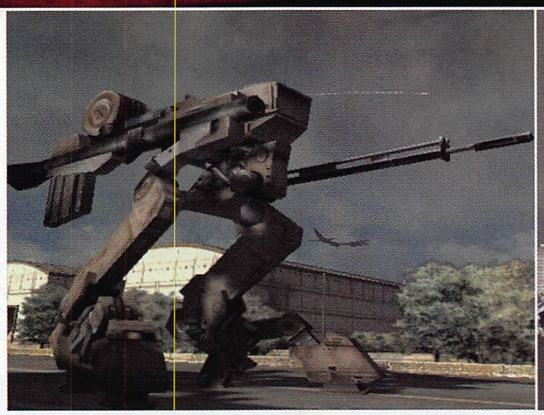
developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: april

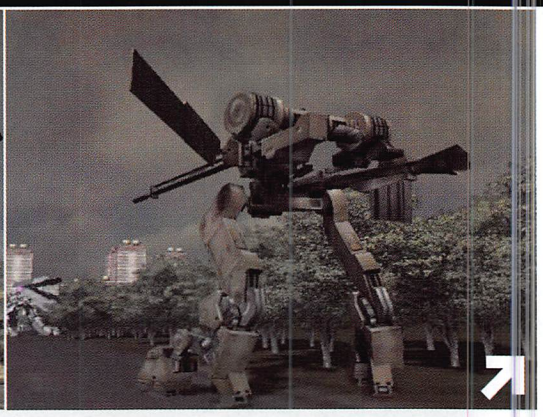
XBOX

Capcom Japan just released these shots of *Tekki* (originally known as Brain Box), their second effort for Xbox. We have but one piece of advice for mech fans: Prepare to be thrilled. With this game, you will become a mech pilot. Not like ZOE, where you were zipping around like a gymnast, but like it would actually be (if mechs actually existed, that is).

Played from a first-person perspective, *Tekki* is visually astounding. The detail of the cockpit is incredible, but it's what's happening outside the viewscreen that truly stuns. Explosions and particles fly around the screen, and the environments are rendered with all the detail that the Xbox can muster at this time. In other words, it approaches reality.

As if this were not enough, *Tekki* will also boast the most convoluted, cumbersome example of

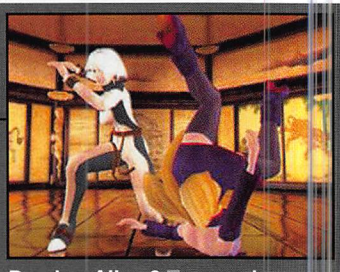




JAPAN'S TOP TEN (as of 02/24/02)

Not surprisingly, Dead or Alive 3 tops the Japanese Dengeki chart as the top-selling Xbox launch game

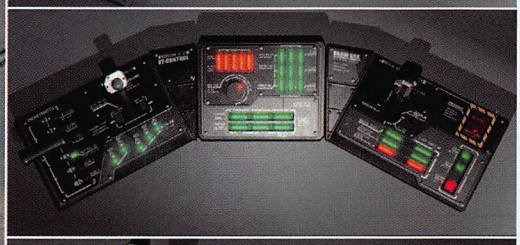
1. **Dead or Alive 3** Tecmo **xbox**
2. **Animal Leader** Nintendo **gc**
3. **Sangokushi Senki** Koei **ps2**
4. **Grandia II** Enix **ps2**
5. **Samurai** Spike **ps2**
6. **Genma Onimusha** Capcom **xbox**
7. **Virtua Fighter 4** Sega **ps2**
8. **Project Gotham** Microsoft **xbox**
9. **Final Fantasy X International** Square **ps2**
10. **Animal Forest +** Nintendo **gc**

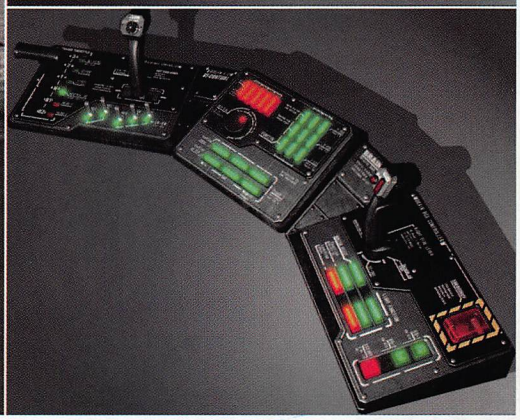


1. **Dead or Alive 3** Tecmo **xbox**

inspired overkill that we have ever seen. The special controller (pictured at right) is laden with toggle switches, lights, and over 40 buttons. Yes, this device is for the truly insane (like myself). Don't count on a U.S. release for this monster of a controller, but do look for *Tekki*. It's going to be awesome.

PETER GARDEN





You are looking at the most insane peripheral ever devised, the 40-button mech controller for Tekki. That's a lot of controller.

SPACE CHANNEL 5 PART 2

I liked the original *Space Channel 5*, but I didn't love it. But I love the sequel, as it corrects the two biggest problems I had with the original. One, the annoying delay that plagued control inputs has been nearly eliminated, making the game's heroine, Ulala, much more responsive as she imitates Simon-style the prompts from the computer opponents. Two, the streaming prerendered backgrounds have been replaced by real-time ones, eliminating the sometimes-distracting sensation of the characters sliding around a bit on the backgrounds. Now the characters and environments exist in the same world.

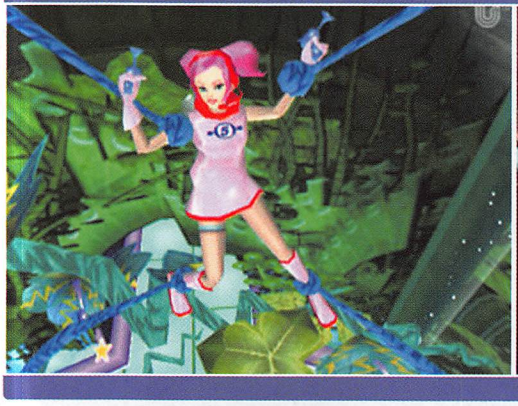
As for the game itself, it boasts the same kitschy futuristic vibe as the original, with wonderful imagination evident in the design and play, which now features instrumental sections and a bit of the old karaoke for good measure.

PETER GARDEN

PS2

developer: sega/uga
publisher: sega
available: now

play rating ●●●●○



076 COWBOY BEBOP: KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR
080 BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM
082 NOW AND THEN, HERE AND THERE
084 DIRTY PAIR: FLASH
084 THE ADVENTURES OF MINI-GODDESS
084 SOUL HUNTER
086 **EXCLUSIVE:** ANIME MOVERS AND SHAKERS

play ANIME

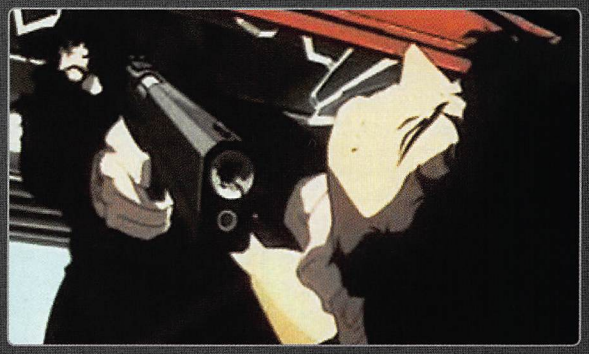
COWBOY BEBOP KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR

Spike, Jet and the rest of the *Bebop* gang make the move to the big screen —with heavenly results

written by **dave halverson**

How can I properly preview the *Cowboy Bebop* movie, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*, without going into too many specifics, causing *Bebop* fans the world over to hunt me down like a two bit perp? I'll start by stating the obvious, that seeing these characters *highly* animated borders on the euphoric. Surrounded by a production that is so drenched in cool it practically slides off the screen, and a soundtrack that resonates as perfectly as the series theme music, this little slice of celluloid has "huge success in America" written all over it. With Sony at the helm of the theatrical release, with any luck *Cowboy Bebop* is about to turn on and tune in a whole new audience to the joys of big budget Japanese anime. *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* can only be classified as a side story, for obvious reasons—the group is all together. The action begins with Spike and Jet pulling double duty at a mini mart stickup (as only they can—everyone dies—but with the utmost style and grace) but we quickly find ourselves in the midst of Ed and the luscious Faye, God's gift to animated beauties. The meat of the story begins to unfold when Faye witnesses what appears to be a terrorist bombing but quickly deteriorates into something much, much worse. Whatever it is, there's a 300,000,000 Wulong price tag on it so the team is on it. Anything to get off the Ramen and into some steaks! But enough of my sappy dialogue—there's a Q&A with *Bebop* character designer Toshihiro Kawamoto on the next page. I had to ready the questions prior to seeing the movie, but he makes the best of them.

DAVE HALVERSON



WANNA' TAKE HER HOME?

How much would you pay for 18 inches of Faye Valentine? If you've got 178 Wulong laying around, we certainly can't think of a better way to blow it. This beautiful cold cast porcelain statue (with base) sculpted by Yugio Ageta can be ordered through Diamond Comics Distribution or found at finer comic book shops. For more info, visit Fewture Models at www.fewturemodels.com

FATHER OF THE BOP

A brief but insightful chat with Cowboy Bebop character designer Toshihiro Kawamoto

Translation by Ai kennedy

Cowboy BeBop has established itself as one of the most stylish anime series ever, thanks in no small part to your character designs and a distinctly retro feel. What inspired your designs?
The director often suggested specific actors as examples for The characters nd In these cases, I'd refer to the actors, but not too realistically. I tried to work within a delicate balance, between real people and Manga style.

Were you influenced by any American TV or cinema growing up?
Yes, the TV series "Mission Impossible", "Combat", "Six Million Dollar Man" and "Bionic Woman" . The Movies I enjoyed were disaster film like "Towering Inferno", War and Sci-Fi stuff. I saw "Star Wars" when I was in junior high school. At that time, I became greatly influenced by the realistic portrail of the characters' lifestyle in the movie.

Do you look at a concept first and then design characters, or, design characters and then come up with a concept?
That would depend on the individual title, it's on a case-by-case basis. In the case of "Bebop", the director presented me with written descriptions for me to base on my designs on. I modelled the characters,based on those written concepts.

Is Faye 100% from your imagination or is she inspired by somebody?
I didn't base Faye on any existing actress. She is an original. Maybe her name (if anything) was taken from Faye Wong. But while I was designing "Faye", I was also designing characters for titles from "Tatsuya Egawa" and "Masamune Shirow", so I was likely influenced by their respective artistic styles as well.

Has anyone approached you regarding a next generation BeBop video game?
Not so far (I don't think there are any plans yet)

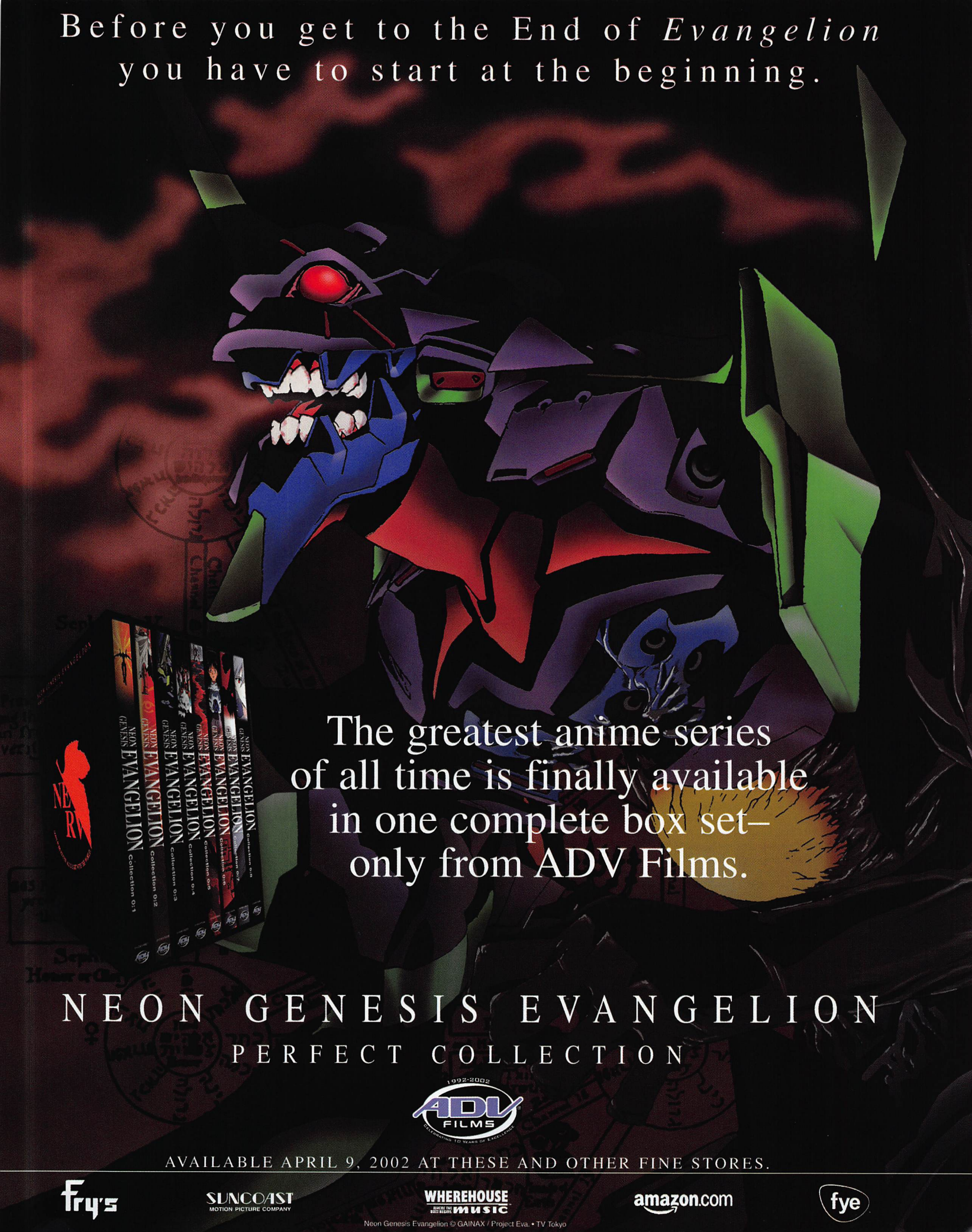
Who is your favorite BeBop character?
"Ein"! (Laughs) I have a Corgi myself, so I feel a strong attachment. Drawing him, I would be so absorbed. As for human character it's "ED". It's fun to draw her absurd actions.

What changes take place transitioning from a series to a movie?
The four main characters were drawn the same. "Ein" was given a singular adjustment, (one more pattern was added on his body) by specific request. The big change was the reinforcement of our layout staff, which allowed us to sober the tone with regard to the coloring and make a more attractive presentation for the big screen.

Did you create Cowboy BeBop with a Western audience in mind?
Not particularly. I'm so pleased with the unexpected praise from overseas. I was requested to illustrate a world of many races and religions so I accessed international photography books for examples of different cultures.

And finally, how does Faye keep her breasts from popping out of her shirt? Might we see a little bit more of her in the movie?
Interesting.(Laughs) Thinking back, maybe Faye felt too confined, with that sparse clothing, one could see the bust line perhaps protruding sometimes. (Laughs) As for the possibility of showing a "little bit", please look forward to the movie. Maybe some scenes will fulfill your expectation.

Before you get to the End of *Evangelion*
you have to start at the beginning.



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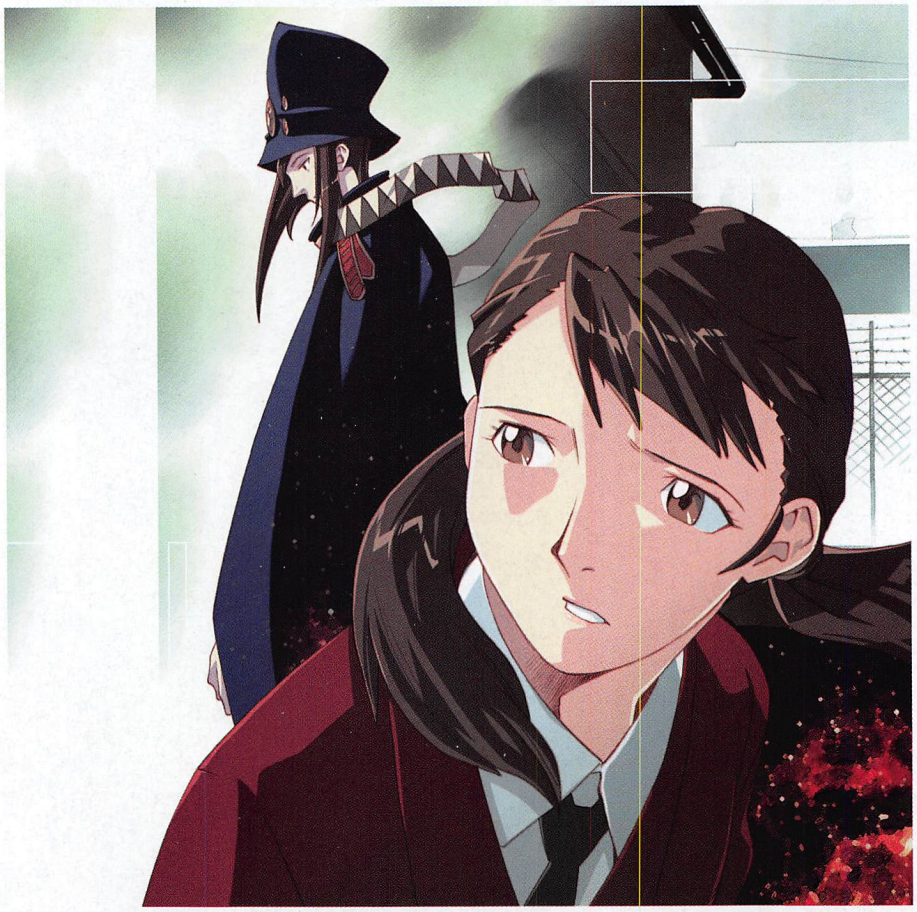
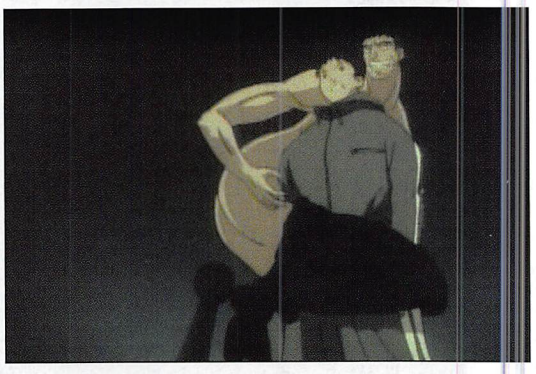
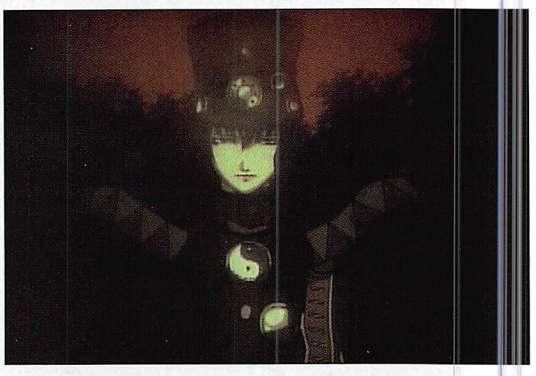
BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM

the right stuf • **85 minutes**

play rating ●●●●●







Japanese late-night TV has become a valuable destination for offbeat adult anime fare. Take *Boogiepop Phantom*, *Lain* and *Hellsing*, shows that might have otherwise not seen the light of day because of their violent and sexual content. Deemed too racy for daytime TV, the shows live in the late nighttime slot—a perfect place for those seeking a little more bite in their anime diet.

Horror is an area that I feel is neglected when it comes to anime. Aside from a few solid releases such as *Devilman*, *Miyu* and *Amon*, attempts at the genre have rarely been satisfying. *Boogiepop Phantom* is a giant exception. It is so refreshing to watch a show that rewards its audience with such strong storytelling. Director Watanabe Takashi (*Slayers*) delivers a frightfully good time, tapping into intense themes of regret, guilt, remorse and loneliness.

Killer cops, soul eaters, and phantoms—those are the incessant dangers in the unfortunate lives of the students at Hijiradani High School! A cross between the *X-Files* and a more somber *Buffy*, *Boogiepop Phantom* features the mysterious being known as Boogiepop, a being neither good nor evil. It all begins one night when an eerie flash of light gleams across the sky, bringing the creature into the world. The characters in *Boogiepop* live in a world where anything can happen at any time. At first, the show seems to follow a familiar horror anthology format, but things are not that simple. There is a connecting narrative to the proceedings, and events that might seem strange or out of place in one episode will be explored and explained in later episodes, connecting these seemingly random stories into a cohesive yet fragmented storyline. It all works wonderfully, as displayed in stronger episodes such as "Interlude" and "Wrteyu."

The show attempts to defy expectations, with each episode ending with an exciting twist to keep you coming back for more. There are now many characters, but only a few remain constant to the ongoing storyline, and each scene carefully fills out the background information on each character.

Its largest fault is a tendency to frustrate and alienate: comparisons to another late night shows will no doubt be made, but I prefer *Boogiepop*'s pace to the ultra languid *Lain*. Artistically, the show is fantastic, and everything from the music to character designs is handled with style. It maintains a dark and foreboding tone, slowly drawing you in, yet there is still a limited appeal. But taken as a whole, *Boogiepop* is daring and stands apart from the current crop of happier anime toons.

E.G.

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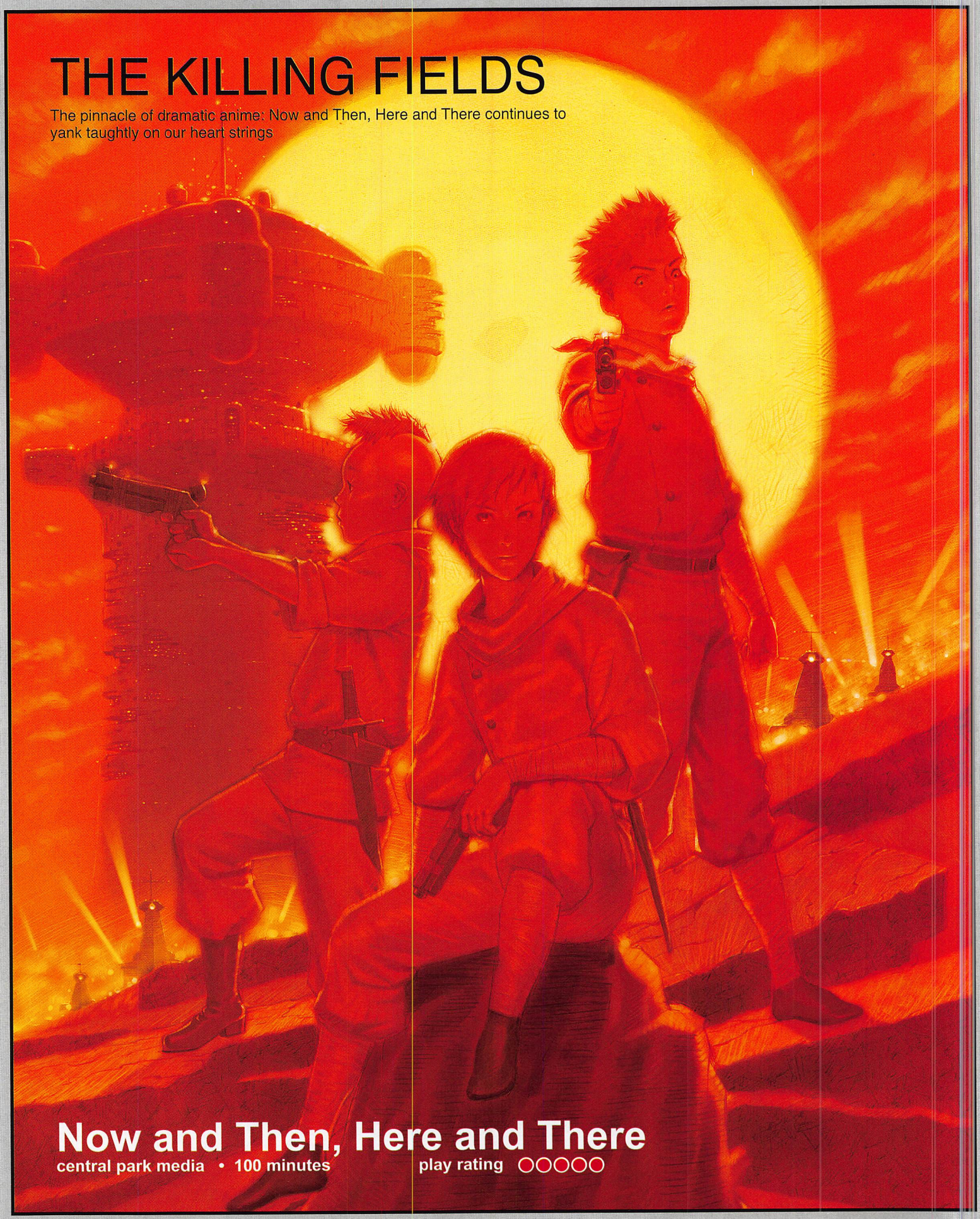
THE KILLING FIELDS

The pinnacle of dramatic anime: Now and Then, Here and There continues to yank taughtly on our heart strings

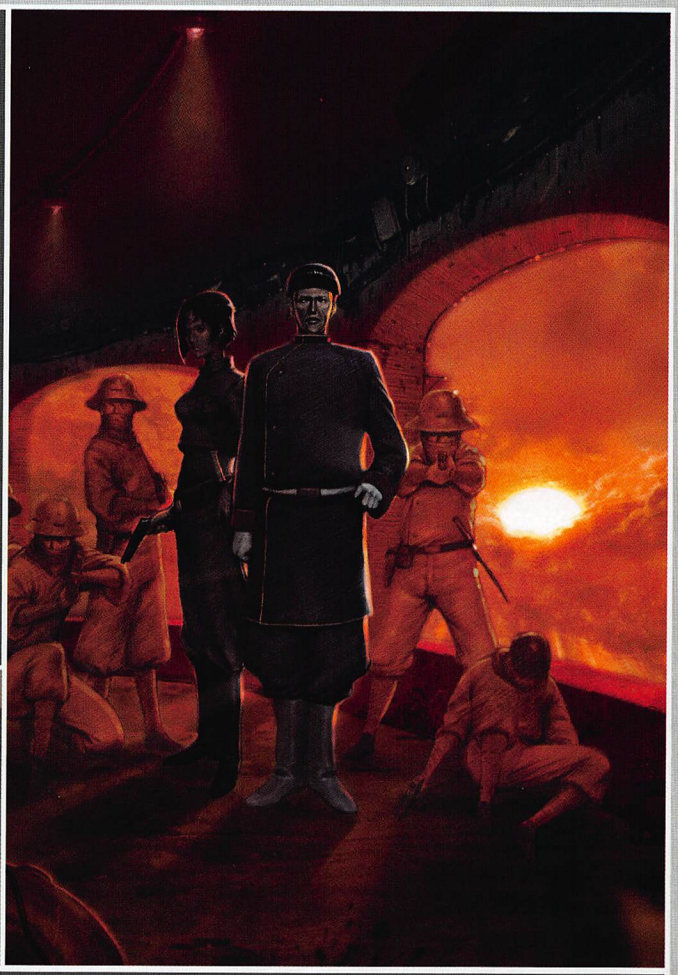


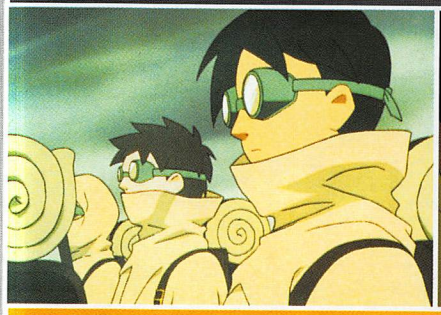
Now and Then, Here and There

central park media • 100 minutes **play rating** ○○○○○

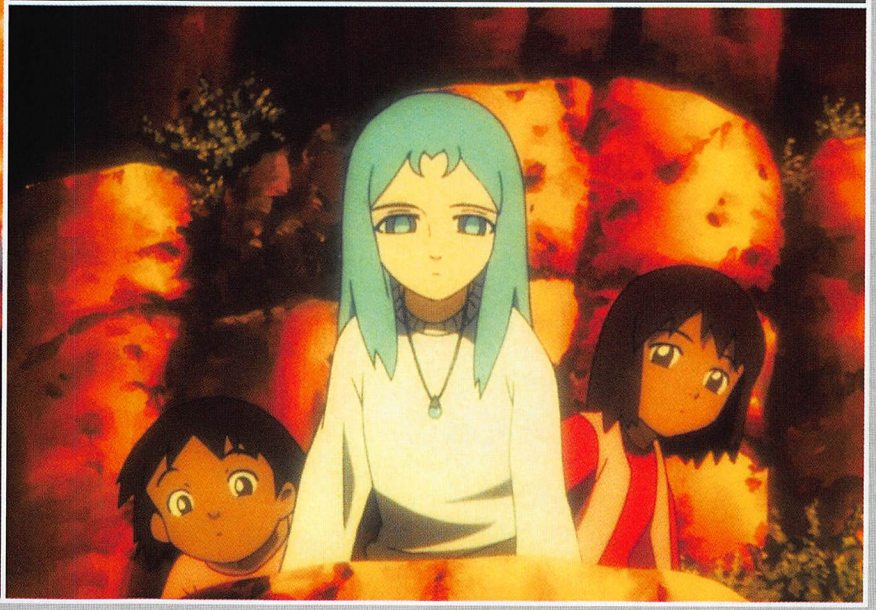
"Because 10 billion years time is so fragile, so ephemeral, it arouses such a bittersweet, almost heartbreaking fondness." What do the words that precede each hypnotic episode of *Now and Then, Here and There* mean? That this is but a tiny moment in time so brief that, in the grand scheme of the universe, it's painful contents are somehow insignificant? You'd have to be dead not be moved by this gripping tale of children—torn from there families—kidnapping (and often times killing) other children for the sake of necessity, driven by a maniacal mad king bent on world domination. Pillaging humans from other dimensions, or his own backyard, King Hamdo will stop at nothing to get his monolithic war machine moving again—a gigantic fortress fueled by water, which is in tragically short supply. At the forefront sits Lalaru, young and abused by every segment of humanity she has attempted to serve with her life-sapping gift. She harnesses the power to create massive floods with the pendant around her neck, and Hamdo's mad desire to control her fuels his cruelty as we spiral deeper and deeper into the effects his treachery has on the lives of the world around him.

So dramatic and understated that it is at times hard to watch, *Now and Then, Here and There* is as captivating a dramatic anime I have ever experienced. Su–the Earthen boy with the heart of gold who so diligently endeavors to stop him–comes across as a true hero, someone to cheer for at a time in our history when, ironically, cruelty is at the forefront of our world stage. Although conducive to being trapped in a nightmare, *Now and Then, Here and There* is a thought-provoking slice of animation that is not to be missed. At the very least, it makes the phrase "there's no place like home" ring truer than ever; at the most, it may make you a little bit happier to be free.





"Whether you praise its message of hope or weep for its blatant brutality, there's no denying its dramatic angst."



anime capsule reviews

dirtypairflash . theadventuresofminigoddess . soulhunter

Dirty Pair Flash

ADV FILMS • 12 & UP
125 MINS

"[on the] *Random Angels* DVD are four out of five episodes that epitomize what *Dirty Pair* is all about"

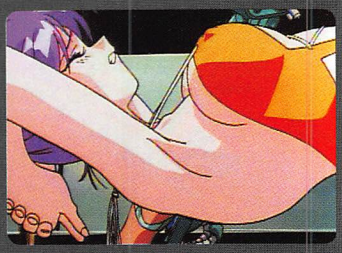
play rating ●●●●●

Tucked away within the confines of ADV's *Dirty Pair Flash: Random Angels* DVD are four out of five episodes that epitomize what *Dirty Pair* is all about—hot babes and shit blowin' up. In "Snow White Chaser," Kei barely averts getting blasted out of the sky and ends up alone in the snow-covered wilderness, chased by a massive death squad… with a baby. The son of a dead senator's murdered wife—this heir apparent's only hope dons a pair of double-D's, and to say the least, is not the mothering type. In the end, Kei gets peed on and her breasts end up saving the day. Need I say more?

Episode 2, "Pink Sniper," is another instant classic, complete with a teddy-bear mech and an evil 17-year-old contract killer named Monica, whose assignment is to assassinate Kei and Yuri "beautifully and spectacularly." If The Joker had a daughter, it would be Monica. Next, "The Winners in Summer Colors"—in which Kei and Yuri go undercover as professional volleyball players—is pure guilty pleasure (we're flashed generously and often) and comes complete with a coach that makes Hanz and Franz look like girlie men.

The disc's last act, "The Grey Colored Avenger," closes the show with a bang…or ten. You may as well skip through "My Boy in Rose Color," Yuri's self- infatuation wet dream; it's as fruity as its title.

DAVE HALVERSON



The Adventures of Mini-Goddess

PIONEER • 13 & UP
100 MINS

"*Mini-Goddess* exhibits a surprising level of detail, especially given the serious subject matter..."

play rating ●●●●●

For being a gag on *Ah! My Goddess*, *Mini-Goddess* exhibits a surprising level of detail, especially given the serious nature of the subject matter—like a rat marrying a tea kettle. The hit series (and movie) revolves around three Heavenly Goddesses who descend from heaven and take up residents with a young college student, Keiichi, with the explicit purpose of making his life happy. Three hot chicks moving in with no parents? I'd say he scored. Anyway, when Keiichi is away, the girls they play, shrinking themselves down to hang out with the rat of the house—Gan, who they marry to a tea pot, launch into space and mutate into Gabira, in the single best Godzilla spoof of all time. Tongue rammed like a jackhammer in cheek, fans will dig this silly DVD to no end, while everyone else brave enough to give it a go will be pleasantly confused.

DAVE HALVERSON

Soul Hunter

ADV FILMS • 12 & UP
100 MINS

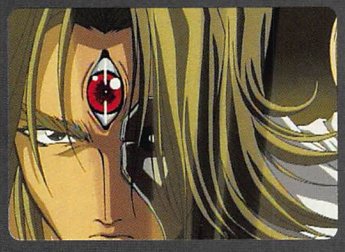
"Like the first volume, [this] walks the fine line between comedy, drama, and adventure..."

play rating ●●●●●

My love affair with *Soul Hunter* continues as Sibuxiang (c-bu-sang), the flyin' Twinkie, and Taikoubou (tie-ka-bo), the boy sent from the heavens to clean up the Yin Dynasty, continue to recruit allies willing to go up against Dakki—the she-devil that's stolen the remote to the emperor's brain. It appears the scent of her Keisai Genjo is just too powerful to resist! In volume two, we find the honorable General Bunchu—after trying in vein to break Dakki's hold on his beloved Emperor—planning strategic measures to clean house, while Taikoubou is off recruiting the stubborn but powerful Raishinshi, the lost son of a powerful Lord (his 100th!). Busy Lord.

Like the first volume, part two, *All the Queen's Men*, walks the fine line between comedy, drama, and adventure with ultimate finesse, succeeding at all three to the degree that each episode seems to fly by like a fat-winged hippo. And while some of the pop-culture references inserted in to the English dub seem a tad out of step, the comedy overall is interpreted well by ADV into the English tongue, which, in this instance, I imagine was particularly trying. Whenever you've got hot bods wielding powerful Paopeis (pow-pay), things are bound to get a little freaky.

DAVE HALVERSON

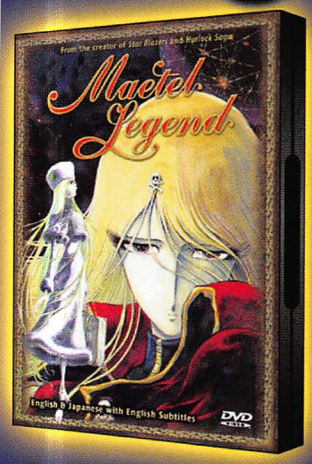


From the creator of

Captain Harlock!

Leiji Matsumoto's

Maetel Legend



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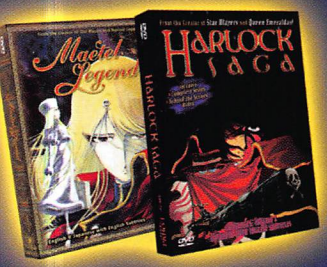

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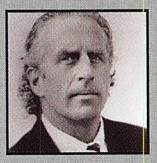
Of the five largest US anime companies (Pioneer, Bandai, ADV Films, Central Park Media and Manga Ent.) two are divisions of larger Japanese corporations while the ladder three were all forged by entrepreneurs right here in the USA. We spoke with all three regarding the state of this ever burgeoning market sector and their respective roles in it...

anime movers and shakers

John Ledford
president
ADV Films



Marvin Gleicher
president
Manga Entertainment

John O'Donnell
president
Central Park Media

How (and when) did you get started in the business?

JL: I was originally introduced to anime in 1991 through a couple of friends. Upon first look, I became immediately hooked on anime; however, I was running a video game importing company at the time and my attention was with the then-present business. After discovering that many of our best-selling imported games had also been animated as films in Japan, I began to take a serious business look at actually getting into the anime business. Throughout the first months of 1992, I made several contacts and then offers to Japanese companies and began looking for someone who knew a lot more about anime than I did at the time. After an intensive search, I was introduced to Matt Greenfield who I founded the company with on August 15,1992. ADV's first title was Devil Hunter Yohko, which we released on December 15,1992, just four months after ADV's inception. Devil Hunter Yohko proved to be a wonderful success since it was one of the first titles to come out in America that did not revolve around sci-fi or giant robots. Following on the heels of Yohko, we released Sol-Bianca and one of our most famous titles Battle Angel. In less than three years, ADV went from a company that was releasing a handful of titles a year to releasing between four and five titles a month. Today, we are the largest American producer/distributor of Japanese Animation. The last ten years have been quite amazing.

MG: I started producing animated commercials in the '70s and produced an animation for the United Way. I also was a photographer, cinematographer and film editor, having produced and directed several music videos, one TV show, and scores of commercials. In the early '90s, I saw Appleseed on a US cable Japanese TV station and flipped over the technique, story and style. I was then running a Record company for Island Records called Smash. In 1994 I was given the opportunity by Chris Blackwell (Palm Pictures and Island Records and Pictures founder) to start Manga in the USA and then expand the territories to as many parts of the world. Manga was first distributed by Polygram and now WEA (Warner, Elektra, Atlantic distribution). Which brings us to today.

JD: I've been involved with the video business in one way or another since 1977, when I came out of grad school and started working for Sony at their Tokyo HQ. I've lived in Tokyo for a total of three years, so I got a good chance to become familiar with the anime on TV, and the general manga phenomenon. I first started publishing videos in 1981, but my first anime release was Voltron, in the late 1980s, when the show was just becoming popular on television. It was so successful that it became the first anime title to qualify for the RIAA's gold and platinum video certification (the video equivalent of gold and platinum records). I still have the plaque hanging outside my office at CPM!

martian successor nadesico

Are you a fan?

JL: Absolutely. You have to love what you do and the material you work with in order to have the passion and devotion required to build a successful business.

MG: Yes, I love the way they are written, the culture, stylization and character designs. Also, now I am a big fan of the new digital animation technology being used and developed.

JD: I love anime and manga, but I'm certainly not enough of a trivia buff to qualify for "full otaku" status. I'd rather watch anime than worry about memorizing the names of all of the directors and designers and voice actors, for example. I'm always amazed at how little I know about anime, compared to many of the CPM staff, who can trace the complete ouvres of specific directors and character designers, or who know the latest gossip about the inner workings of the various production companies with whom we deal.

Looking back to its roots in the US and then ahead five years, give us your assessment on where anime is today and where you think it is ultimately headed.

JL: Ten years ago anime was very niche. Dubbed titles were practically non-existent nor well accepted to the marketplace. Mainstream stores would not even consider carrying the products. Companies like ADV, Streamline and Central Park Media helped change that through innovative marketing efforts and by offering a wide variety of titles in both dubbed and subtitled formats. Thanks to titles like Pokemon, Sailor Moon and other popular television series that were more family friendly and acceptable to television, anime today has become more widely known in America. The viewer base that first came into contact with these titles have grown up and are looking for more traditional, more edgy anime. Hollywood took notice of anime after the Pokemon explosion and saw the billions of dollars that came from that success. It's safe to say that looking in the years ahead, more and more of the big studios and their subsidiaries will be acquiring and/or co-producing anime or anime-esque titles in an attempt to find the next Pokemon.

MG: Years ago Anime was limited to Astro Boy, Speed Racer, Star Blazers and Gotchaman (Battle of the Planets). American television was very limited in what it plays (and they still are). Seven years ago, Japanese animation was also very limited in its distribution channels. Manga was the first company to be distributed through a major (Polygram/Universal) and was able to open up all the major video sell through and rental accounts and set up anime sections. Today and in the future, more programs on Cable TV are playing then ever. With the success of Pokeman, Dragonball Z and Sailor Moon, TV has opened a broader market range for the future. The genre will continue to grow at the slow and steady pace it has for the last eight years. Still, the big feature films will continue to expand its appeal.

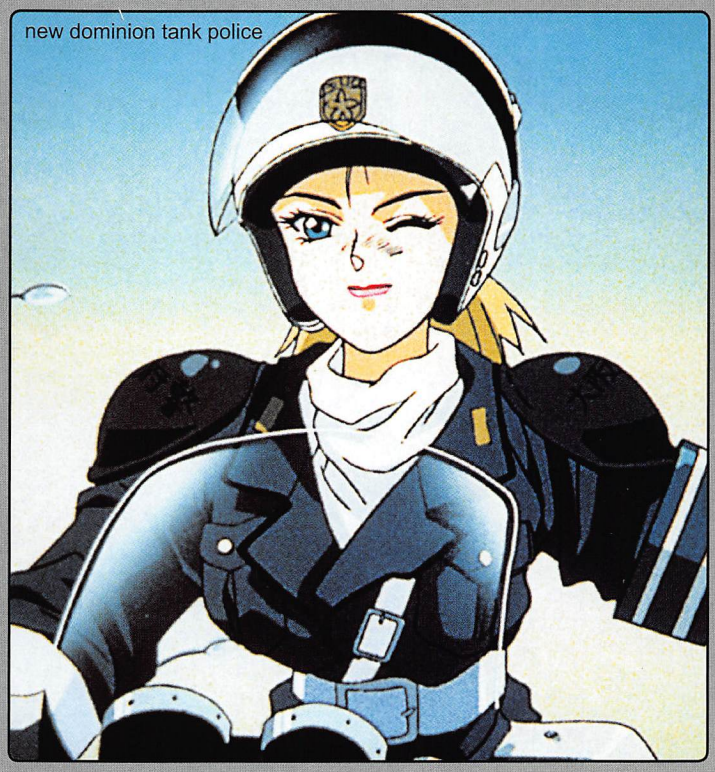
JD: I break the history of the U.S. anime video market into several phases. Phase One was the l980s, when the market consisted primarily (with certain exceptions, of course) of bootlegs, imports, fan subs, and a small number of professionally released anime videos which were very hard to find in the mainstream distribution channels like Blockbuster and Tower Video. Those were the days when you had to look far and wide-to-find anime, and cons were usually the best place to find them (usually as bootlegs!). The second phase was the pre-Pokemon 1990s, when Central Park Media became the first anime company to achieve mainstream distribution into large video retail chains. We actually distributed most of our competitors at that time, just to achieve enough product momentum to convince store buyers to carry anime as a separate section all by itself. Of course, we had a hard time using the word "anime," since most retailers kept asking us what an "aye-nime" was! To get over this, we began to popularize the term "Japanimation," although we weren't the first to coin the phrase. It's funny that while many U.S. fans don't like this term, it has actually become a common word used by the Japanese anime industry professionals in Japan. Phase Three of the anime video market began with the success of Pokemon, which broke anime into mass market consciousness for the first time. Pokemon launched a new wave of anime on TV, further increasing the appeal of anime and opening up more retail outlets to the concept of carrying anime video sections on a regular basis. We are still in Phase Three, as far as I am concerned, but well on

our way to Phase Four, which will be when anime finally becomes a day-in, day-out concept, well-integrated into American popular culture. If you think of rock and roll as an example, it was first a new and controversial concept in the '50s and '60s, then it became a mass market product in the '70s and '80s, so that by the time the '90s came around, it had become a standard element in traditional mass market advertising and mass popular culture. Now, if you go to a Rolling Stones concert, you'll see up to three generations of family members all enjoying the same music. The kids growing up watching Sailor Moon, and Dragonball Z and Pokemon on TV today, will probably still be watching anime when they become adults, just the way my generation still listens to rock and roll.

What acquisition are you most proud of?
JL: There are so many, but if I had to pick a number one, it would be Neon Genesis Evangelion, of course.
MG: Earlier: Ninja Scroll and Ghost In the shell, Currently: Blood and Neon Genesis Evangalion
JD: Actually, I'm still proudest of our very first acquisitions, like Project A-ko and Dominion Tank Police, which were among the very first legitimate anime titles in the U.S. video markets. The reason is that we were breaking entirely new groundwork with the Japanese licensors, who had to be convinced that there was a market for their products in the U.S. We also broke new groundwork in marketing these titles, using the Internet to communicate to anime fans (in the pre-World Wide Web days, mind you!). We were the first anime company to have its own chat rooms on Compuserve, for example, in the days when we had to pay a surcharge fee for blindingly fast 9600 baud rates! We created the industry's first anime newsletters and were the first to advertise in the video industry's major trade publications. Today, of course, everyone does these sorts of things, but I'm proud of the fact that we did them first, thereby showing the rest of the anime industry how to do it right. Another acquisition I'm proud of is Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend. We released this groundbreaking movie theatrically and blew away the midnight movie ticket sales records at many theaters across the U.S. It took real guts to bring this program to the big screen, and we did it by focusing on the artistic merits of the film, not the sensationalistic contents, which were inconceivable in an animation at the time. Toshio Maeda, the creator of Urotsukidoji, was recently honored by the Japan Society as their Keynote Speaker at a major symposium they held, thereby validating our confidence in the merits of this film.

What do you feel is your company's strong suit?
JL: ADV has assembled one of the most impressive groups of passionate individuals in the business who are all dedicated to growing the anime market. The organization has its own culture that encourages creativity and quality in the products we produce. And any company is only as good as its people and products.
MG: Marketing. We are the ones who build the core base for the genre through thousands of theatrical screenings and on college campuses—and in store visibility. All spearheaded by Mike Egan.
JD: We are the most professional company in the anime industry, in terms of meeting our street date commitments to the retailers, providing customer service to our wholesalers and retailers, developing sales and marketing campaigns, and making it easy for the general video industry to embrace anime as a profitable product line. We also have the goal of giving many different types and genres of anime a fair crack at the U.S. market. Some companies only try to license the "hottest" new releases, while we pride ourselves on the breadth of our catalog, even though we know that some titles will not be the biggest sellers. We feel that to build the anime market in the U.S., it is important to provide all kinds of titles, aimed at all kinds of customer segments. For example, we have the largest catalog of any anime company of videos based on works of Japanese literature, from "Genji Monogatari" (the world's first novel, written by Lady Murasaki almost a thousand years ago) to the Nobel Prize-winning works of Yasunari Kawabata. These will never sell as well as Slayers or Lodoss War, but I feel proud that we have made them available to the U.S. market, as a way of furthering our company's motto of World Peace Through Shared Popular Culture.

Have you found that English dubbing is now more important than ever? What is the secret to a great dub?
JL: In order to reach the mainstream American market, whether a theatrical, television or home video release, an English dub is essential. The secret to a great dub is this: It's a team effort. The translators, writers, producers, directors and actors all have to blend their talents to re-create the magic of the original work... in English. Even then, you can't always please everyone. It doesn't matter if you have the hottest current stars in Hollywood, there will always be a few (usually very) vocal persons out there who do not like who was cast for a particular character.
MG: The original language is still the most important aspect because *that's* how the creator saw and heard it. No dub can ever recreate this, however what one tries to do is create the same feel and emotion in the character that was intended and carry the nuances into the new language. For Anime to reach better and high levels wider acceptance will be through dubbing.
JD: There is no question that the average American does not want to read TV! Dubs outsell subs by 10 to 1 or more, so the market preference is very clearly on the side of dubs, as painful as this may be to the purists in the anime fan community. The secret of a good dub is to spend time to understand the characters, their motivations and emotions, and to hire the best talent available to direct the production process, using the best voice talent we can find.


new dominion tank police

What do you feel is the strongest genre currently?
JL: The kids' market is definitely the strongest anime sub-genre market from a financial or demand standpoint. After that, frankly, it's up to the quality of the production and the producer's ability to deliver exactly what the customers want. Those who like sci-fi might not like fantasy, but perhaps they like a good horror or samurai film. The strongest genre is the one that the public is buying into "right now" and that changes like the wind.
MG: Science fiction
JD: It's not a genre issue, it's a television exposure issue. Programs shown on TV will always outsell programs not exposed to the mass market via TV, regardless of genre.

Where do you put the anime buying public age-wise?
JL: If you look at all the anime available in America today, from kids video up to the most extreme hack-and-slash titles or complex subjects, the customers range from 12 to 35 years old.
MG: 13-29 80% male
JD: When we launched CPM in 1990, over 90% of the anime video buyers were over the age of 18. Now, the average age has dropped to the low teens, indicating that kids are seeing anime on TV at a much younger age, and starting to collect videos while they are still in junior high or so. On the high side, there are plenty of anime fans in their 40s and 50s, with a lot of interest in anime on the part of those in their 30s. Not a lot of anime video buyers over the age of 60, but there are a few, actually.

Okay, top three all time, let's have 'em.
JL: ADV's top three of all time or my personal top three? (Since this is an email interview, I'll just have to answer for ADV.) Not in any particular order: Neon Genesis Evangelion, Robotech and Bubblegum Crisis-Tokyo 2040. (If you don't count Robotech as anime, then throw in Martian Successor Nadesico.)
MG: Metropolis, Ghost in the Shell, Akira

JD: Whose? CPM's, or the entire anime industry? Based on what? Sales, or artistic merit? Here's my Top Three in terms of, "If you ain't seen these, you ain't seen anime," regardless of their sales history. To keep it simple, I'm limiting myself to CPM titles. "Grave of the Fireflies:" Probably the most moving work of art I've ever seen in the anime medium. From Studio Ghibli, arguably the finest team of animators at work today. "Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend" (theatrical version): This film single-handedly created the "erotic grotesque" genre, and has probably been imitated (usually poorly!) more than any other anime film. In terms of "breaking the envelope," this film has done more to open up the eyes of the world to the potential of the anime medium than any other film in anime history. This is the film which broke all the rules, and won, big-time! "Project A-ko:" One of the earliest, and still one of the best. I'm nominating this one because it is probably one of the best introductory anime films I can think of to show someone who is not yet into anime - it has all of the genre elements (comedy, robots, sci-fi, parody), appeals to all ages, and is genuinely a fun romp through the anime landscape - with one of the best music soundtracks ever, by Joey Carbone, making it a landmark in US-Japan co-production history as well! Now, let the arguments commence, eh?

What is the next BIG thing (or things) from _____

JL: ADV has an extensive list of titles that we have acquired but not yet announced, for strategic reasons. What I can mention are some of the anime titles that I am personally looking forward to in 2002: "Excel Saga", "Saiyuki-Paradise Raiders", "Full Metal Panic", "Spriggan", "Lady Death" and "N..." (I'll have to let the readers figure that last one out.) On the live-action front, "The Jim Henson Company's Farscape:Season Two" and "Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda" will both be extremely popular with sci-fi fans.

MG: Eva, Virus, and Astro Boy

JD: Now and Then, Here and There will blow you away. It's great. Check it out.

When you make your acquisitions what do you base your decisions on? In other words what do you feel drives a truly great anime? Is it more animation, story, character design...

JL: Here's our secret to acquisitions: I just cut out the pages of various Japanese animation magazines, put on a blindfold, and then throw darts at them and (since I'm blindfolded) have someone look at them to see where they land. <Just kidding.> Seriously, though, ADV has its finger on the pulse of the English-speaking world animation market. We listen to our customers and look for titles that fit the criteria they want. It's part science, part intuition and part darts (oops, I meant art).

MG: It's all of those but the project needs that organic continuity to really be a masterpiece. All aspects of production are important. We try for the highest quality. We have passed on some famous titles that I felt we very poor in production quality. My background in animation and film just doesn't allow me to acquire those. I think the fans also deserve it.

JD: All of the above. Simple rule for great anime: "Tell a story people want to hear, with characters they want to meet, and try to keep the costs lower than the revenues."

Do you think that co-ventures, with American companies funding Japanese animation will finally bring anime movies into the same arena as major US animated movies?

JL: It's already happening. Whether or not those companies will be successful remains to be seen, but the money is already being spent and titles will be coming out in the years ahead. You can also expect several popular anime titles to be turned into big-budget live-action features in the not-too-distant future.

MG: No, not particularly. The stories will still maintain that eastern culture and maybe one will hit big but it is still a growing genre...and animation still has a children's stigma -dominated by Disney, WB and DreamWorks.

JD: Yup. It's already happening. You'll see a number of these come out in the next few years.

Do your find that your fans prefer following series anime over buying individual movies or OVA's?

JL: That all depends on the story. If you can create a tight story, develop the characters and wrap it all up nicely in ninety minutes or less then people will buy it. If you have an epic story to tell, the fans prefer a longer series where the development of the characters and story go into much more depth and richer detail than in a typical feature-length film.

Size up your competition... or not, this one's up to you!

JL: Disney, Dreamworks and a company that doesn't exist yet. That's it.

MG: Scumbags

JD: We appreciate our competition for two reasons:

1) We're not proud - we'll steal a good idea from anyone!
2) No one is useless - they can always be used as a bad example!

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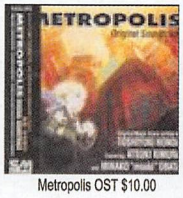

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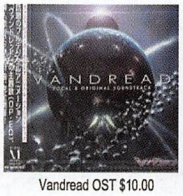

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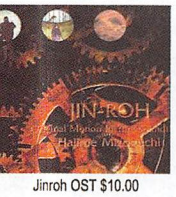

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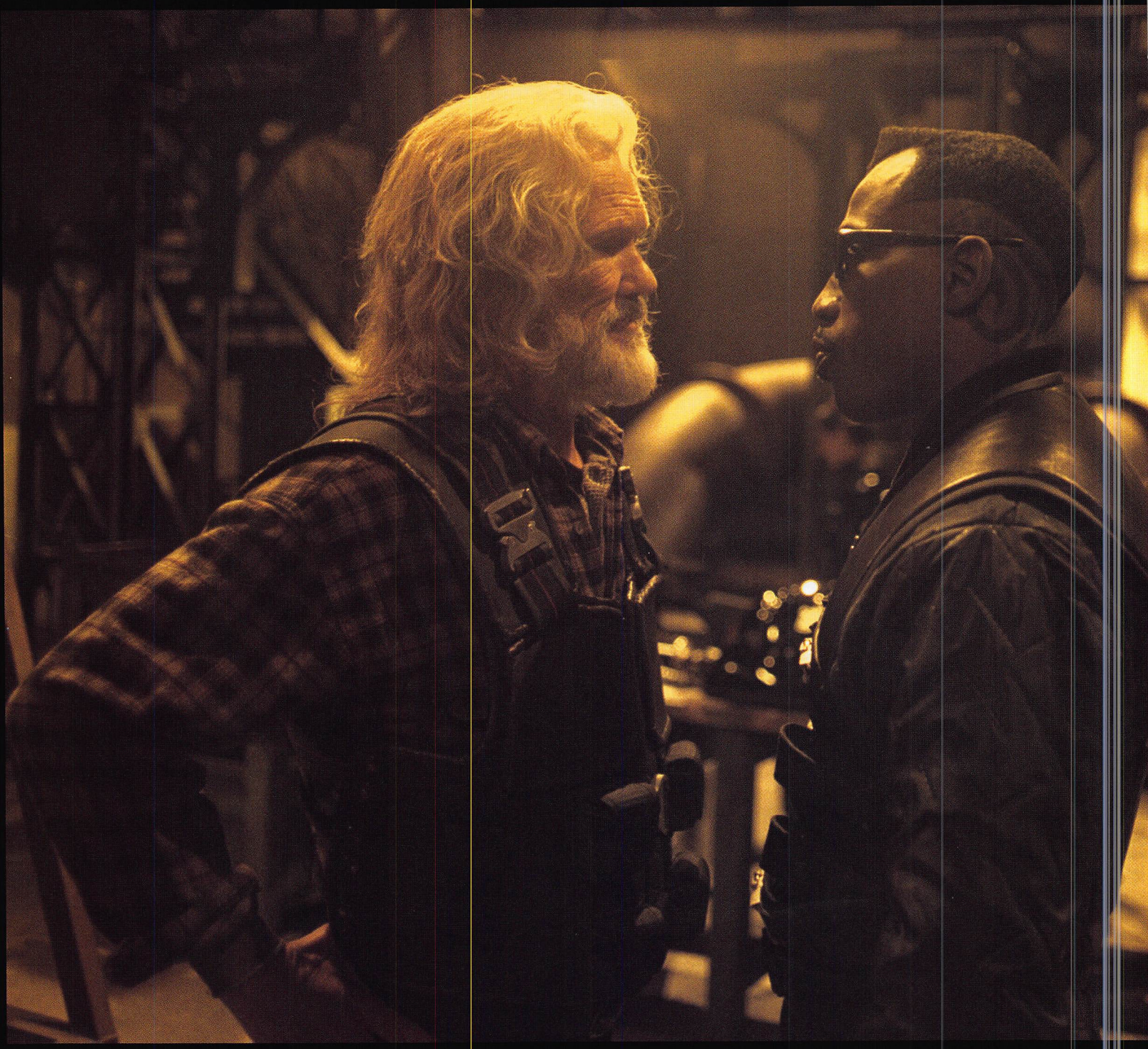

play media

092 **zoolander**

092 **legend 2**

092 **jay and silent bob strike back**

092 **shaolin: wheel of life**

092 **session 9**

092 **the one**

092 **the musketeer**

094 **joy ride**

095 **ice age**

096 **blade 2**

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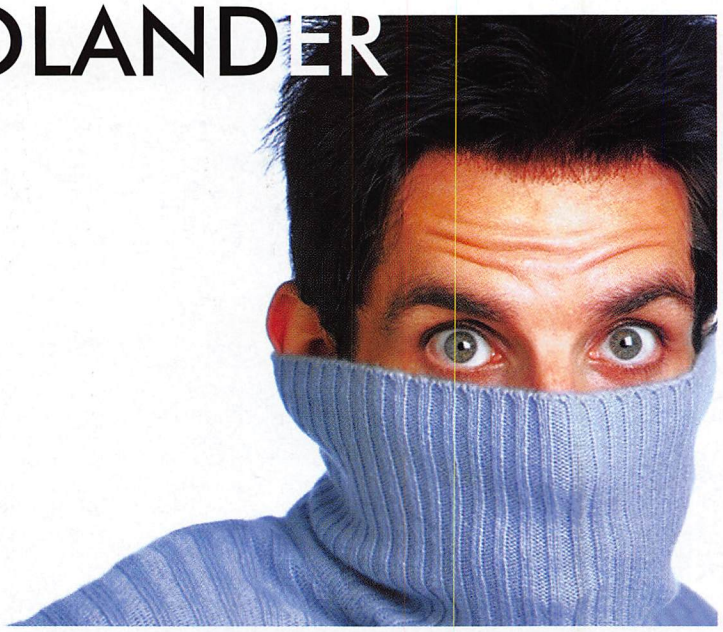
102 **headstrong**

104 **dj crush / cd reviews**

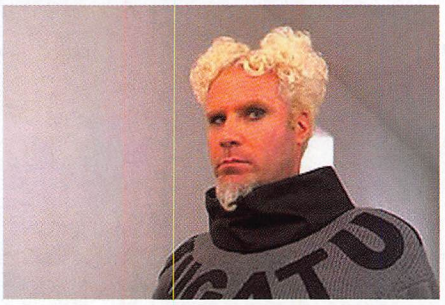
ZOOLANDER



PARAMOUNT
RATED PG-13

PLAY: A special message from the world's most famous male supermodel, Derek Zoolander: "Don't be scared. Words can only hurt if you try to read them. *Don't* play their game." Only Ben Stiller could stir such utter stupidity into a one of the year's most hysterical comedies. To think, it all began at 1996's VH1 Fashion Awards, a ceremony as pointless as McDonald's trying to convince the general public that the Big Mac promotes good health. It took several more years for the idea to completely materialize, going through several drafts and hundreds of miscellaneous revisions (as the DVD's audio commentary will point out on numerous occasions)—luckily, after pounds of cover-up and slick direction by Stiller, the fashion world can finally be exposed for the hideously ridiculous thing that it is. *Zoolander*, to all extremes, is mockery at its finest, poking fun at everything that the fashion community embraces: the art of applying hair gel, the difficulty of negotiating turns on the runway, and the celebrity factor (you know, the *one* star that's always in the front row at *every* Hugo Boss show). Will Ferrell plays his villain, Mugatu, equally as well—he's his usual funky self, like all his loony characters on SNL, he's just wearing designer clothes here. So steer in the direction of this insane "spoof" (minus any annoying Leslie Neilson blunder), one that tackles a universe that may seem unfamiliar to most, but once you dive in, you'll realize that you know a lot more about the fashion district than you thought. Models are dumb—yes, it's true; no matter if they are gorgeous. So laugh. Laugh hard. This is a really, really good-looking comedy.

VALUE: Unlike most deleted scenes, *Zoolander* has a few left-on-the-cutting-room-floor goodies

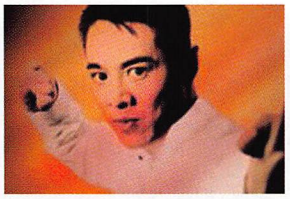


included on this disc that are actually worth watching. But most enticing should be the hilarious outtakes (just imagine what could happen on the set of a movie written and directed by Stiller); and the series of 12 promotional spots that played randomly on cable while the film was in theatrical release (the quote that opened this review was just a small sampling of one public service announcement). Yet, there are also some assets that aren't exactly funny—just intriguing. In the photo gallery, you can scan through the huge media campaign (photo shoots for billboards and magazine covers) that was used throughout the movie. Sure, it's all fake, but you'll be amazed at the effort—and Stiller, along with writers Drake Sather and John Hamburg, will be sure to point that out in the commentary several times, too.

JON M GIBSON

movie ● ● ● ● ○
dvd ● ● ● ● ○

LEGEND 2



DIMENSION/BUENA VISTA
RATED R

PLAY: Here's something old-school: Jet Li, using his undeniable physical prowess, single-handedly defeats a group of 30 kung fu masters. His arms fly at the speed of light; his kicks send foes back into infancy. All the while, Li (playing the heroic Fong Sai Yuk) deposits each weapon behind his back, constructing a makeshift knapsack of bamboo spears. That's style—and that's typical, frantic Asian cinema the way is was originally conceived. Every jump, every swing, every whirl—it's all natural, aided *only* by some precisely choreographed wirework when the action beckons for an amazing 720-degree twist. But to enjoy the violence, first you have to get past a weak story—a typical tale of spasmodic kung fu flicks, wherein a traitor lurks among a revolutionary underground group labeled the Red Flower Society. Mostly, though, it's an excuse to toss in lightning-quick punches and colorful flights of fancy.

VALUE: And here's a missed opportunity: Viewers are forced to suffer through an English dubbing so poor that Li sounds like an excited Herbal Essence singer. Subtitles over the original Mandarin tongue would have been welcome.

JON M GIBSON

movie ● ● ● ○ ○
dvd ● ○ ○ ○ ○

JOYRIDE

20th CENTURY FOX
RATED R

PLAY: It may be deceiving at first glance, but *Joyride* is not a teen horror thriller. And it isn't exactly *Fatal Attraction* either. It falls comfortably in the middle, beginning with a seemingly harmless gag that two brothers play on a lonely trucker. They toy with his emotions on a CB radio, pretending to be a sexy broad named Candy Cane, and chaos ensues from that point forward. Even though a few scenes may cause you to recall that Stephen King/Emilio Estevez terd, *Maximum Overdrive*, don't give in. *Joyride* is better than that; it's hot-wired with intensity.

VALUE: Unexpectedly, Fox has stuffed this DVD to the brim. Once you've tackled four alternate endings (with optional commentary)—which are actually worth watching—veer over to a triplet of alternate audio tracks. Director John Dahl dishes about directing, actors Steve Zahn and Leelee Sobieski chat about acting, and writers Clay Tarver and J.J. Abrams talk the art of writing. You'll even get to sample Eric Roberts fumble through a reading for the voice of the murderous truck driver (it's sad, really). There's *at least* 6 hours of supplements to wander through. Schedule your time accordingly.

JON M GIBSON

movie ● ● ● ● ○
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NEWSBYTES

. . . "The George Lucas Virus" is spreading rampantly: After screening the "20th Anniversary Special Edition" of *E.T.-The Extra Terrestrial*, producer Frank Marshall had a brainstorm. He told the DreamWorks' fan website that **he's now considering "bringing [Indiana Jones] back and spiffing up the effects.** The prospect is mouth-watering." Like *E.T.*, they'll be replacing all guns with CB radios (or so we imagine) . . . A sad day for cartoons everywhere.

JAY AND SILENT BOB

DIMENSION/BUENA VISTA
RATED R

PLAY: Kevin Smith is the crowned king of slacker jargon: The words flow out of his pen. *Clerks*, in all its crude glory, was the first indication. But with *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, the waggish writer/director/editor seals the baggie shut—being the swan song for Smith's two most beloved icons. Favorably, though, this finale is a massive celebration of everything that's been embraced since that inaugural flick about convenience store register jockeys: comic books, anti-commercialism, the chronic, celebrities who are willing to swallow their pride and laugh, even some sex, and, unforgettably, "snoochies boochies." But it all really boils down to one thing: irreverent comic bliss.

VALUE: Talk about fireworks—this two-disc "collector's series" sends the boys off with a bang. There's some five odd hours of extras, but most fetching is the audio commentary by Smith. Ever since the inception of DVD, Smith and his crew have embraced the format; every disc, every feature—for every film (*Mallrats*, *Chasing Amy*, *Dogma*)—is a virtual fondue. Deleted scenes, storyboards, bloopers—it's an entire weekend of entertainment (liquor not included).

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
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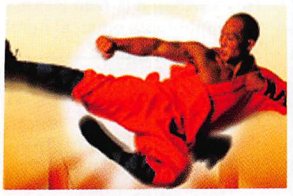
SHAOLIN: WHEEL OF TIME



UNIVERSAL
NOT RATED

PLAY: If theater isn't your bag, fear not. *Shaolin: Wheel of Life* is a remarkable show that begs the martial arts fan to buy a ticket, wear a tux, and indulge in civilized culture. Luckily, though, the dress-up won't be required since Universal has packaged this stage act in dramatic, widescreen scope. The quality isn't pitch perfect—it appears to have been shot on video and transferred digitally—but lines of resolution take a backseat to what is actually happening on-screen. You'll witness the fascinating legend of the Buddhist Monks from China's renowned Shaolin Temple, a story of sorrow, sanctimony and uncompromising action. Superhuman feats are captured in front of a live audience (no wires, just adrenaline), from a young boy flailing around in mid-air using only a thin, elongated stick for balance to a scene of poise and combat atop 10-foot tree-trunks (a la *Iron Monkey*). Like Letterman's "Stupid Human Tricks," these monks leave nothing to the imagination, flipping and flying with grace. It's astonishing.

VALUE: For the limited amount of source material, Universal has crafted a striking disc (a "making-of" featurette and a brief history of the Shaolin).

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●○○

SESSION 9

USA
RATED R

PLAY: At least David Caruso is working again. *Session 9* enters the chiller genre with the same tone as *The Blair Witch Project*, but it doesn't quite achieve the same level of greatness—the men of Hazmat Elimination Company just don't have the allure of a snot-dripping Heather and the overall camcorder atmosphere. However, director Brad Anderson does an amazing job establishing a moody, dark ambience in the abandoned Danvers State Mental Hospital. Yet, the terror doesn't come from the overflowing amounts of asbestos throughout the building. It's more about the small trinkets and 8MM audio recordings that are found while the crew does clean-up. Rumors of demonic possession and medieval medical abuse quickly spur—among other things scary—and the maddening slowly boils until people start to die. The film is eerily effective to some degree, but it's definitely built for an audience with undying patience.

VALUE: Probably the most interesting aspect of *Session 9* is the sound—a meditated, industrial noise that guides the film—but that's barely explored on this DVD. Carson Daly was the executive music producer; someone should have chatted with them.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
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THE ONE

COLUMBIA TRI-STAR
RATED PG-13

PLAY: Lately, the U.S. has witnessed a whirlwind of Asian cinema—but America and marital arts just don't mix well. In *The One*, a complex plot about time-skipping between multiple dimensions is senselessly crammed into 87 minutes. Maybe it's not an impossible feat, but director James Wong spends most of his time trying to peddle the film's soundtrack. Not to mention, the high-flying frolics of his star, Jet Li, are another side-track (it's obvious that the writers struggled to pit Li in as many kick-worthy situations as possible). To the film's credit, the action sequences do divert from the usual Hollywood punches, offering up some nifty slo-mo technology. If only CGI had progressed another five years before this movie was attempted, it could have been executed with more precision.

VALUE: By listening to the audio commentary, you'll find out another intriguing tidbit: *The One* was originally conceived for the WWF's Samoan musclehead, The Rock. But when he was tugged towards another project, Jet Li was hired and the script's dialogue was trimmed by two-thirds. That's the definitive sign that this action flick is good for only one thing: action.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●○○○
dvd ●●●○○

THE MUSKETEER

UNIVERSAL
RATED PG-13

PLAY: Talk about a gimmick that swirled down the toilet faster than that BK Supreme you had for lunch. Though, a tragedy like *The Musketeer* was bound to make its way to a cineplex near you. The promo tag doesn't help much, either: "...as you've never seen it!" It's true to a certain degree: Never before has kung fu been incorporated into Alexander Dumas' epic of adventure (for God's sake, Disney crafted an enjoyable film, even though it starred Charlie... oops, Charles Sheen). Here, unfortunately, the first mistake was casting Calvin Klein underwear model Justin Chambers as young D'Artagnan. He's an underwear model—not an actor. Secondly, when none of your actors can successfully flip around on wires, your project is doomed. So instead of picking up the pieces and moving onto a sequel to *Timecop*, director Peter Hyams decided to put latex molds of each actor's face on a bunch of Chinese acrobats (seriously). You can assume the worst, because it's just that.

VALUE: No attempt was made to distract foolish buyers, mainly because Hyams likes his projects to speak for themselves. And they do: *End of Days*, *Sudden Death*, *Stay Tuned*.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●○○○○
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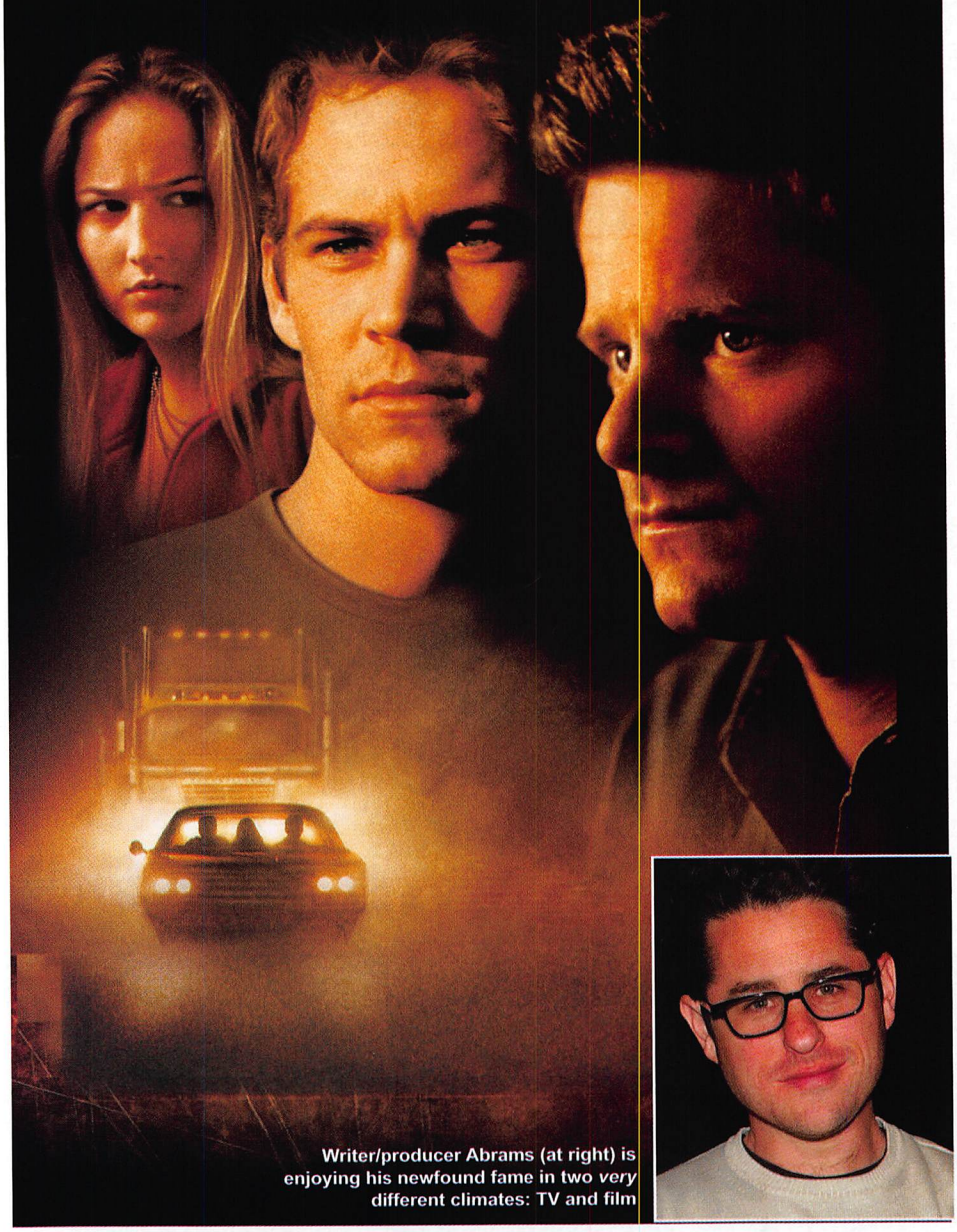
The father of the Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, Marvin the Martian, and Pepe Le Pew—**Loony Tunes auteur, Chuck Jones—died of congestive heart failure at the age of 89 on February 22.** Our condolences; the animation community has lost a legend . . . Make more shelf space: Sony, Matsushita Electric (a Panasonic subsidiary), Hitachi, Pioneer, Sharp, Phillips, Thomson (an RCA subsidiary), Sharp, LG Electronics, and Samsung have all given the "thumbs up" to **a new high-capacity DVD format, called Blu-ray Disc, allowing up to two hours of HDTV or 13 hours of standard video to be recorded on one disc** . . . The undead are back for more: **Both Milla Jovovich and director Paul Anderson are attached to a second Resident Evil film.** The screenplay is currently being written, but its production status is dependent on the first film's theatrical success—and if L'oreal will let their spokeswoman get down 'n' dirty again . . . In related zombie news: **Principle photography will commence on a big screen version of *The House of the Dead* this May in Vancouver, Canada.** The $12 million feature, which is based on Sega's hard-hitting shooter franchise, will be helmed by German commercial/music video director Uwe Boll . . . Calling all princesses in peril: Dreamworks recently unveiled that **Shrek 2, their sequel to the highly profitable twisted fairy tale, will materialize in theaters around Memorial Day in 2004.** Though, not even an ounce of rumor is circulating regarding the film's plot or if all the actors will return to reprise their roles—yet . . .

ROAD WARRIOR

The creative force behind TV's powerhouse, *Alias*, talks shop about superheroes and his pet thriller that's been four years in the making, *Joy Ride*.

as told to **jon m gibson**



Writer/producer Abrams (at right) is enjoying his newfound fame in two *very* different climates: TV and film

J.J. Abrams is the man of the hour. Not only did he create the mega-popular weekly spy extravaganza, *Alias*, he was recently tapped by Warner Bros. to ink the script to the latest big-screen Superman epic. This month, he talks to us about *Joy Ride*, his inaugural American road trip of sorts—yet, it's more *The Hitcher* than it is Ivan Reitman. We enter the conversation as I'm humming a musical number from *Beauty and the Beast*.

Disney fan, are you? "Be My Guest" was playing while I was on hold.
It's not a choice that we have. [Our office] is here at Disney. They force it upon you. [laughs]

Alright, let's talk business. Did you see a gap in the horror genre when you penned Joy Ride—it's pretty unexpected thrill?
It wasn't really that I saw a gap as much as I was inspired by an idea for a scene of these guys playing a prank on someone on the CB and thinking they were anonymous and then realizing they weren't. And that, to me, was an exciting, scary moment. However, how it fit into the landscape of what was available wasn't really a concern.

You enjoy toying with the CB as a kid?
Yeah, I actually did—I had a CB. This was long before cell phones were available. The idea that you communicate with people who were out there—just connecting with strangers was a bizarre idea that is now incredibly common with the Internet.

***Joy Ride* is a huge departure from your first TV show, *Felicity*. *Alias*, as well, is a departure from the themes of Felicity. You're a man of a thousand faces.**
Well, I'm doing *Superman* now for Warner Bros. Having done the movies I've done and the TV shows I've done, I think that you can see that there isn't really one genre that I'm particularly found of—I like playing around with everything. The idea of doing, for example, a scary movie like *Joy Ride*—a suspense thriller—I love doing that. Working on something like that probably makes me hungry to work on something that is as intimate and sweet as *Felicity*. Or working on that makes me want to do something that's more explosive and high stakes like *Alias*. Working on *Regarding Henry* [was] fun, but no one genre is enough forever.

Any dream projects?
Superman, at the moment, is pretty much it. Mostly 'cuz, when I was a kid, Superman was my favorite thing in the world. Having a three-year-old son who's obsessed with Superman and a two-year-old daughter that doesn't seem to care too much about it. [laughs] But my son's obsession with superheroes and Superman is such that you really can't deny the opportunity to work on that movie.

Well, how far off is *Superman*?
You know, we're just writin' the script. I just got on.

TV or film? What's your passion?
I love both of them. The fun of television is that what you're writing you know is gonna get made, you know millions of people are gonna see it within weeks. There's incredible, exciting pressure to get this thing done—get it done well. It's organic, it evolves over time. TV's wonderful in that respect. In film—being a writer for film—it's a form of contained story. Films are much more of an event; there's more time to make them. There's something sort of grandiose about film that you don't really get with TV. And making movies was always my dream as a kid.

You work well under pressure then?
It can get overwhelming, but when it does I just remind myself, "I get to do a TV show. Lighten up. Enjoy it." You know, because it really is an incredible privilege to do this. It gets overwhelming sometimes, but when it really gets overwhelming I just stop and remind myself that it's such a cool gig that I can't take it too seriously.

ICE, ICE BABY

Blue Sky Studios takes us behind the curtain of the latest in CGI epics, *Ice Age*, articulating just how difficult rendering a bumbling little squirrel and his frozen home really is

by **jon m gibson**

"I FELT THAT IF WE WERE GOING TO MAKE A MOVIE ABOUT THE ICE AGE, THAT THE ICE AGE ITSELF SHOULD BE A CHARACTER. SO WE CAME UP WITH THE HAPLESS SCRAT."

The ice age, in all it's enormity, was caused by a squirrel—at least that's the prevailing concept behind the latest in computer-modeled comedies, *Ice Age*, falling directly into the blockbuster genre of *Shrek* and *A Bug's Life*.

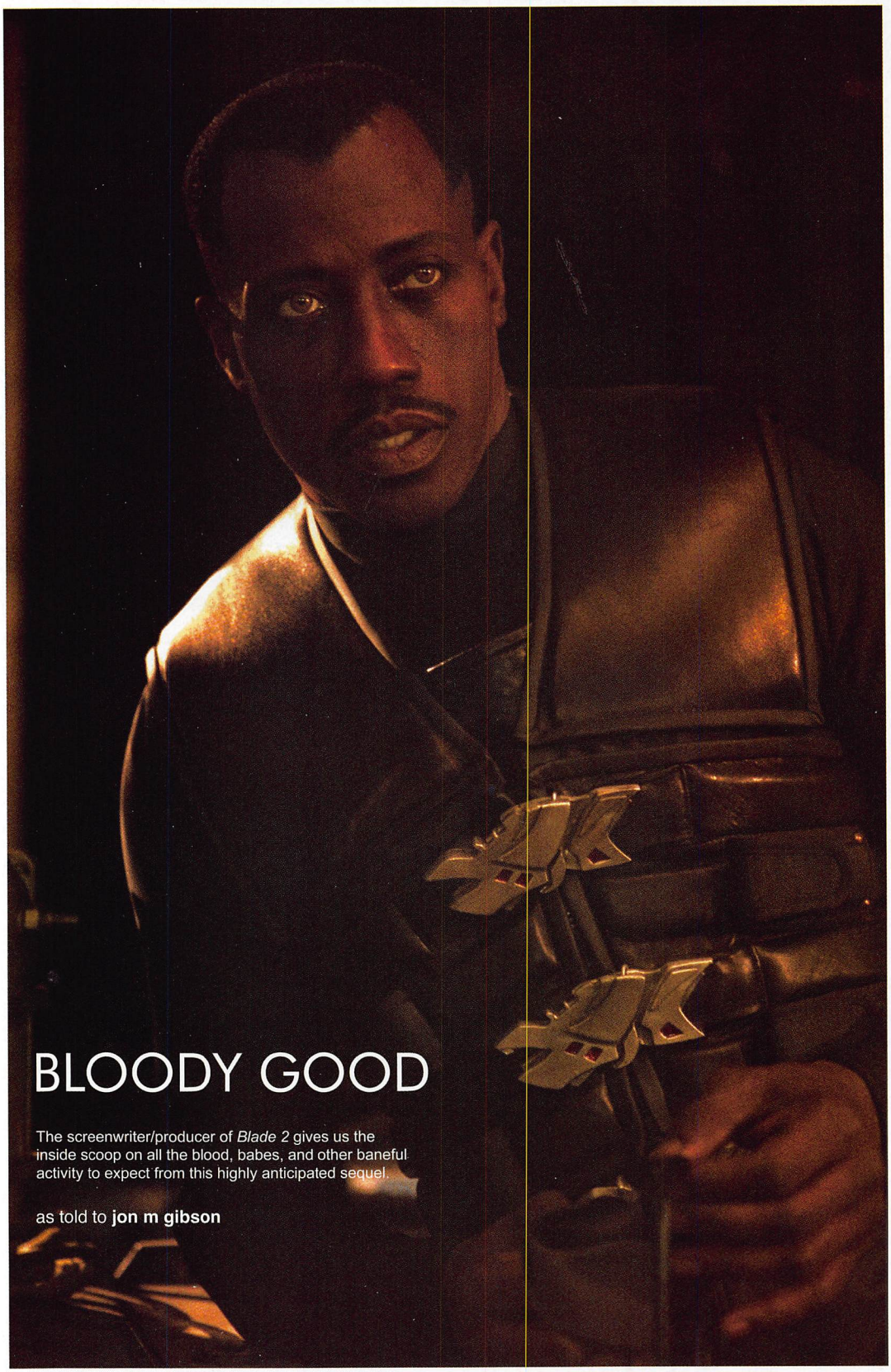
"I felt that if we were going to make a movie about the ice age, that the ice age should itself be a character," director Chris Wedge reveals. "We decided the best way to do that was to send it up against one of the animals you might find there. So we came up with the hapless Scrat." The trailer for *Ice Age* explains it all: Scrat (who, ironically, is voice by conceiving mind Wedge) is relentless in finding a wintertime home for his acorn. But with the land completely frozen over, he foolishly tries to jam it into a glacier, cracking it. The mile-high, Goliath chunk of ice responds by sliding forward, moving briskly south—and Scrat is mere inches in front, scurrying to for his little, furry life. "We have him pop up periodically in one life-threatening situation or another, all to satisfy his need to bury that acorn."

But the ice age isn't an easy scenario to recreate—especially from scratch. "I felt an ice age was a cool place in which to set the film because it's an alien world to us, and we could let our imaginations run with it," Wedge offers. But his untamed imagination is exactly were the complications begun.

To animate a world from 20,000 years past, the filmmakers were first drawn to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. A remarkable amount of time was spent researching the bones of woolly mammoths, paging through countless source materials, and chatting with the leading minds in paleontology and archaeology. "They said, 'Take any liberty you want," Wedge recalls, "'but please just tell us there aren't going to be any dinosaurs in this movie." A common grumble among scientific minds, considering the scaled beasts roamed the Earth 350 million years earlier (apparently, Hollywood never does their homework).

After examining the "real" ice age, Wedge and his crew at Blue Sky Studios were faced with an enormous challenge: creating the frozen tundra from ground up. To add to the film's art direction, specifically for the sake of realism, a special technique called Ray Tracing was employed: "Ray Tracing simulates the complexities of real light, mimicking the matrix of colors and shadow that we experience all the time in the real world," Wedge construes. "It's king of digital cinematography that lets us use our computers like a photographer uses a camera, making everything on screen look more compelling, inviting and tangible." Yet, Ray Tracing doesn't account for particle engines (rendering fur and environments), volumetrics (mountain mist, fog, steam rising off water), and fluid dynamics. Though, the heyday of traditional animation was never forgotten: "We'd often go back to pencil for fast feedback. It's immediate and allowed us to quickly convey certain emotions."

The rigorous workdays and sleepless nights show—it's all in the detail. *Ice Age* will definitely put Blue Sky on the map, just like *Toy Story* launched the legacy of Pixar.



BLOODY GOOD

The screenwriter/producer of *Blade 2* gives us the inside scoop on all the blood, babes, and other baneful activity to expect from this highly anticipated sequel.

as told to **jon m gibson**

The infamous half-human, half-vampire is back for blood. But this time—in the more comic book bent *Blade 2*—he's being hunted by a devious group of bloodsuckers called the Bloodpack. So in order to get some answers and maybe even some on-set gossip, we tapped screenwriter/producer David S. Goyer for a mid-morning chat. What follows is an uncensored glimpse into our casual conversation about the future of the gothic-grudge franchise.

So I hear you wrote the movie?
I wrote and produced it.

One of many producers.
Yeah, but only some of us did the work. [laughs]

There's more blood in this sequel, eh?
Ah, it's certainly not less violent. [laughs] I mean, I don't know. I've seen it so many times now. I was just at the mixing stage this morning where we are doing the final mix. I've just lost all objectivity in terms of, "Is it violent? Is it not violent?" It's like I don't know. I've seen it 30 times now. So...

You're desensitized?
Yeah.

I was just watching the original *Blade* on DVD a couple of weeks ago, and the special effects are so dated now.
Yeah.

They're actually pretty shitty.
Yeah, they are.

How have you guys improved on that?
The effects in the sequel are great. I mean, they are fantastic. I look at a lot of the effects in the first film and I still kind of cringe at them. I love the jump that Blade does from the hospital onto the roof next door, and I still think that it's a really great effect. And I think the train sequence is still pretty good.

The opening action sequence at the beginning. That's just amazing!
Yeah, but that's not an effect.

But there's a lot of style there.
Yeah.

But the climax at the end, when Frost gets cut in half... geez, computer effects have come so far.
Yep.

Was that a result of the budget?
No, not really. It's learning from our mistakes. We kind of got boned by some vendors in the first film. And this time out, we knew the effects in the first film could have been better. We were just determined to make sure that we went to better sources.

So just judging from the trailer, audiences are going to be taken down quite a darker path than the first one. It's more stylized. Obviously, it's a different director. How dark is this

film vs. the first, and is that a result of what you were writing, or the result of a director, and how do those things come together?
Well, I don't know that it is darker than the first film. In the first film, Blade was filled with self-loathing, you know. Blade himself, as a character, is lighter in *this* movie. He's happy with who he is. He's come to terms with who he is in this film. The villains in this movie aren't comedic in the way that Stephen Dorff and Donal Logue were often quite funny, you know? I think that, in turn, that humanized them. In that regard, that's an element that doesn't exist in this film because the civic circumstances that the villains are going through is grimmer than the first film, because vampires themselves are being hunted as well and jointly they find themselves to be very frightened by what's been going on. But I don't know that it's darker, per say, although the ending's one of those everybody dies endings. [laughs]

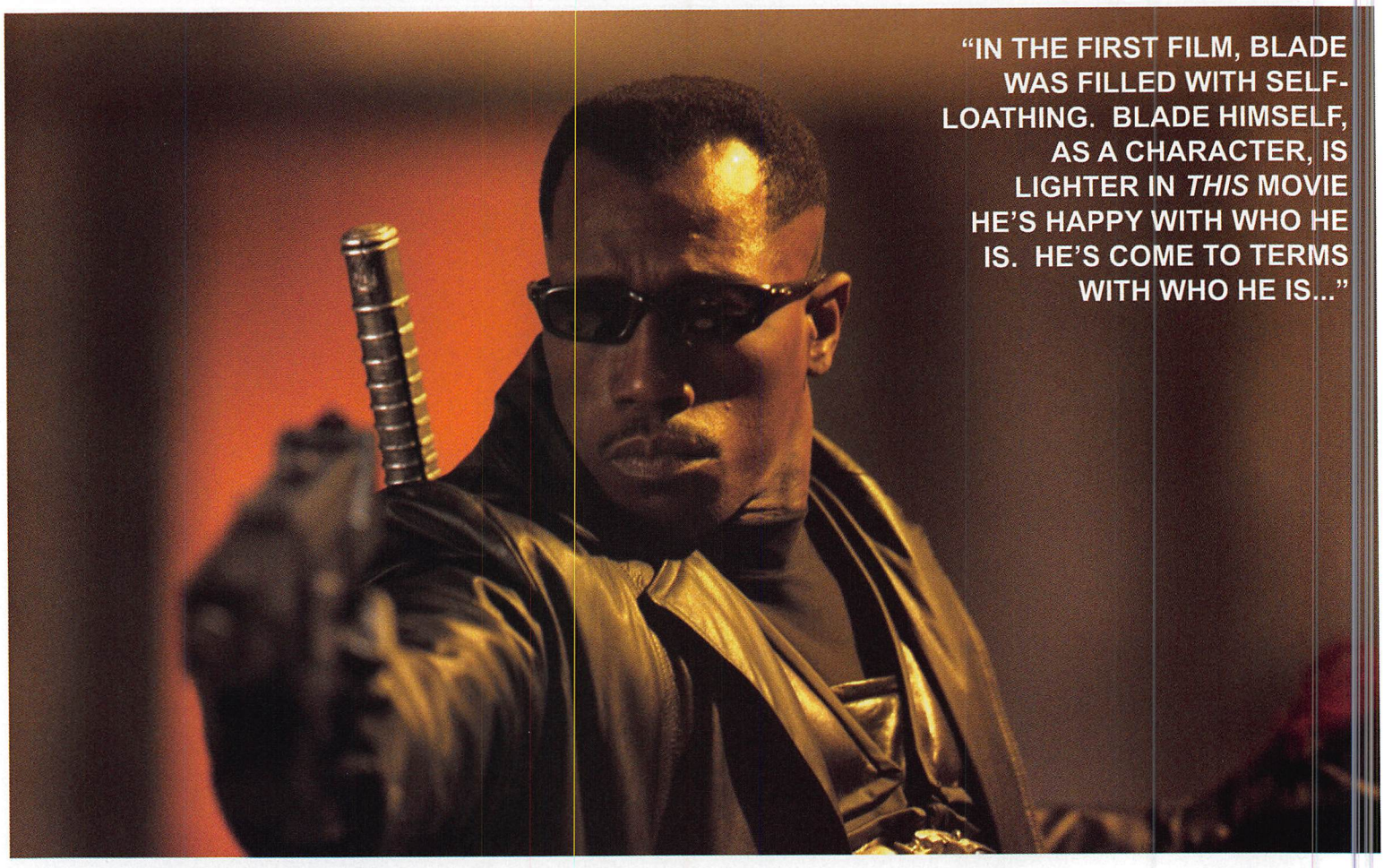
Ahh, *Reservoir Dogs* style.
Yeah. I mean, it definitely has a very tragic, almost Shakespearean-like ending in terms of how everyone turns on each other at the end. Because it is one of those circumstances where, you know-whenever there has been an uneasy alliance between different factions, it's all going to go to shit at the end and everything is going to erupt in an orgy of death; which is certainly what happens.

Hey, we all love that.
Yeah.

I heard it was under wraps as well. A lot of actors didn't even know what was going to happen to their characters.
That's true to a certain extent. I mean, Guillermo [Del Toro, director of *Blade 2*] and I made some choices in mid-stream to let some characters live longer and what not. Yeah, to a certain extent, when you're dealing with the group, the Bloodpack—which is the team that Blade hooks up with, the group of vampires—you want to see which one of them will emerge as a full-fledged character. And that's a function of casting and what not. So the one's that we felt had more promise, we started tweaking around more with. And I don't want to say who lives or who dies. But, if we do a third film—which we do have a plan for—it's not going to be as linked to the first two films as, perhaps, the second film was linked to the first film. We're going to make a quantum jump about 20 years in the future.

Well, let's see if you can answer this: Of the Bloodpack, what actors do you think wouldn't really be as prominent as they once were—based on the actor's strengths.
I can't say that. [laughs] It should be obvious in the movie—the ones that get more play are the ones we liked the most.

And the ones you killed off first are the ones you hate, huh?
Not necessarily. I mean, we had a blast. We wrote the character, Rienhardt, for Ron Perlman—someone that Guillermo and I are both friends with. So that was the only Bloodpack character that was specifically written for someone. We knew that he would do a great job and he ended up sinking his teeth into it-pun intended—even more so than we had anticipated.



The rest of them look like newcomers, though.
Most of them are. One of them, Donnie Yen, comes out of the Hong Kong Martial Arts School. He's been a fight choreographer in a lot of films. He was also the actor and star in the film *Iron Monkey*. Most of them are relatively newcomers, per say, and we didn't necessarily need them to be high-profile people. At one point, Mark Dacascos was going to play one of the Bloodpack, which I would have loved. I thought he was fantastic in *Brotherhood of the Wolf*. That was one missed opportunity that happened. I think they work well together. They are a fun group.

There have been a lot of elderly beatings on the set. Kris Kristofferson is 65 years old and he's been taking a lot of crap. I heard he hurt himself quite a lot.
Yeah, these are tough films for him to do, but we were talking one day and I was telling him how excited I was to have him back on the sequel. And, just from a selfish perspective, I love having him around, I love talking to him, hearing his stories. He's in the pantheon of super cool guys for me. I asked him, "Why did you decide to come back?" And he said, "'cuz my kids fucking love these movies. They would kill me if I didn't come back." So I said, "Will you come back for *Blade 3*?" And he said, "I have to. My kids. My kids love me." I mean, none of these films are easy to shoot. He hurt himself; Wesley hurt himself. They're tough. They're grueling. But they're kind of fun, too. Wesley and Kris, Peter Frankfort, myself, Lynn Harris, Neil the executive producer—we've already gone through 'em twice. So there is definitely a shorthand way. And when we go to do it a third time, we all know each other quite well—we trust each other. So it's also kind of fun to hang out together.

Were there any really close calls or was it just minor injuries on the set?
No, no, no. They were minor injuries. Wesley cut his hand at one point with a sword, but it was minor. He tweaked his knee and that required us filming one fight sequence in L.A. seven weeks. There wasn't anything major.

Being a comic-book geek, should I, along with all the other comic-book geeks in the world, expect a more stylized comic book atmosphere in this sequel?
This movie does have, I think, a more overtly stylized comic book atmosphere. This movie was also very influenced by anime, which Guillermo is very steeped in. This movie is less set in the real world than the first *Blade*. It's kind of deeper into the underground world. There are far fewer actual humans. In the first *Blade*, there were a lot of scenes where the violence between Blade and the vampires kind of spilled over to the real world, whether it be a hospital or some kind of outdoor market. It doesn't happen in this film. This film is more about going to places where vampires exist and congregate, and a lot of hidden terrain that vampires populate.

At the end of the first movie, we saw Blade in Russia. Does that continue over into the next movie?
Yeah.

I know you filmed in Europe, so does it begin right there?
No, it begins a few months after that, but it does connect to that. We do talk about how he got from Russia to where the movie begins.

I'll give you a nickel for all of the other plot secrets you spill.
[laughs] I'm not spilling any plot secrets. [continuing his laughter]

You know you want to. No, that'll ruin it for our readers.
If you ask me something specific, I'll try an answer it, but...

Who's this hot lady?
Leonor?

Yes.
Leonor Varela. She plays Nyssa. I believe she comes to us by way of Chile. I might be seeing her for dinner tonight.

Aw, lucky man.
She's very sweet and a looks good strutting her stuff as a "vampire hottie," as somebody said at one of the preview screenings. She's good. She's very regal. Tightly wound for the beginning of the film and lets her hair down progressively and she and Blade develop a little flirting relationship, which is a new situation for him because she's the first vampire that he is forced to treat in a very human way—if that makes sense.

Is the Bloodpack strictly vampires then and Blade is only half-human, half-vampire?
Blade is half-human, half-vampire. The Bloodpack are all vampire and they have been training for the last two years to go hunt and kill him.

Really?
But, in this situation, he teams up with them because a greater threat emerges.

You mentioned Guillermo was inspired a lot by anime. When you were penning the script, what was your main inspiration? Were you working with Guillermo throughout the whole process?
I wrote the first draft on my own, and then Frankfort and I had always wanted Guillermo to direct it. After we talked him into it and he came on board, I did another pass with Guillermo, working in junction with him. I wasn't influenced so much by anime, per say. I would say the largest inspiration for me on this film was *The Dirty Dozen*.

In what sense?
Because it is a movie about a man forced to team up with a group of surly convicts for a mission where they all will be expendable, and he knows that if he doesn't keep his guard up, at any moment, one of these guys could try and stick a knife in his back. And that's the same predicament that Blade finds himself in in this film.

I've always been curious, what's the process like for writing an action sequence on paper? Is it mostly based on decisions made by the choreographer?
You'd be surprised, in some of my scripts, how much the final sequences look like what I first wrote. Sometimes a stunt coordinator will come in and say, "We just can't do that" or "That's not safe enough" or something like that. But there are some very specific beats in some of the action sequences of the film that were in the very first draft of the script. He cuts the person this way or he uses this weapon on this person.

So you go into page-long treatments details and all?
Right.

Aren't there conflicts?
I was writing a sequel to my own movie and I was one of the producers, so I could use a certain short hand. Guillermo and I come from very similar backgrounds in terms of our points of reference. So do Stephen Norrington and I. So there might be times were I might describe something in a very comic book way, like I would describe Blade being restrained in a Jack Kirby-like device-like something you would find The Thing restrained in—things Guillermo and Norrington would know what I was talking about. Whereas, maybe some other directors would not.

Speaking of comic books, you are working on the live-action *Ghost Rider* movie as well, are you not?
I have been. Now it's kind of in a little bit of development hell. It was at Dimension. It looks like it might be flipping over to Sony. So we will see what happens.

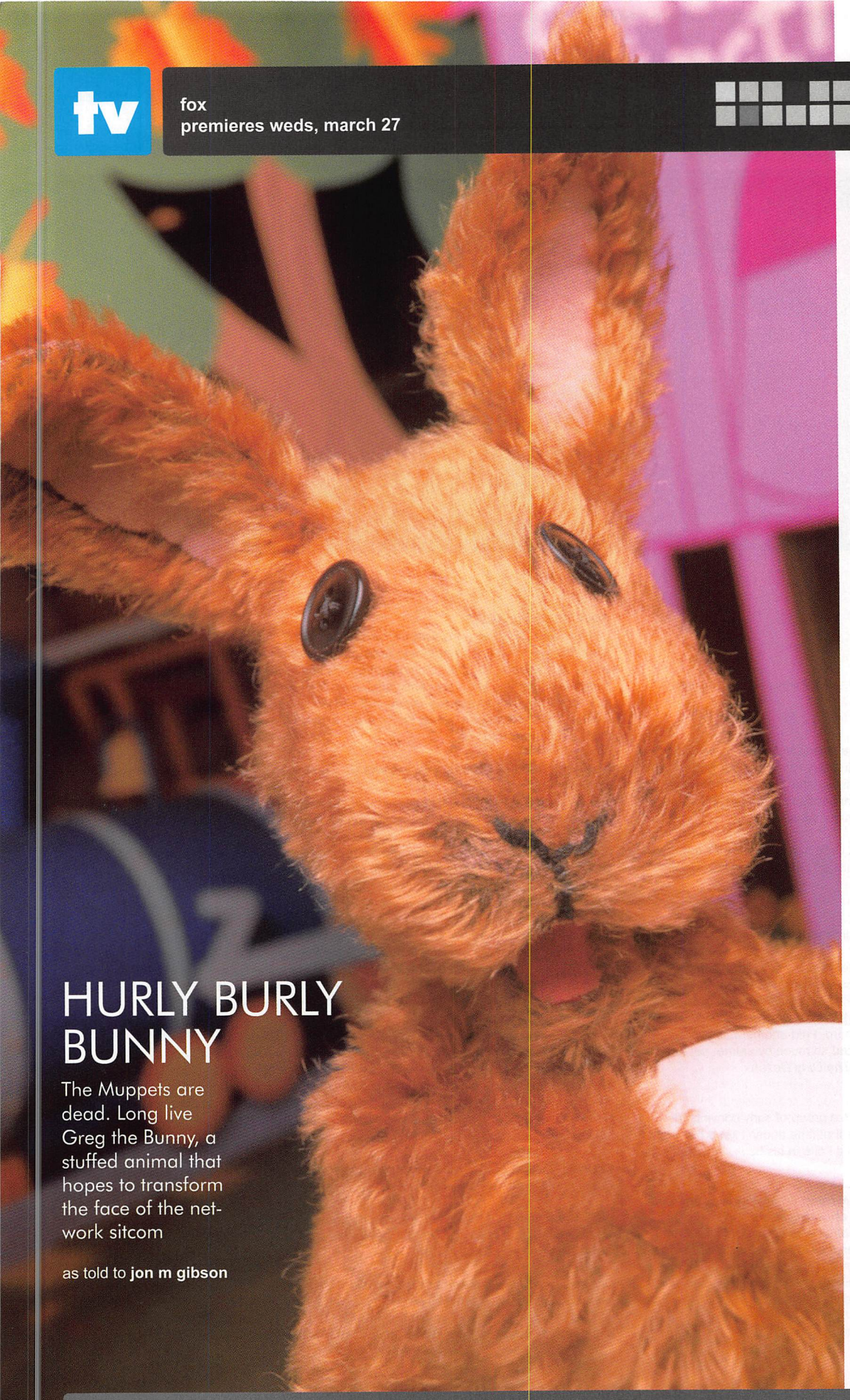
Is a movie like that even accessible at this day and age, because it would be laden in CG. Wouldn't it be nearly impossible or very expensive?
Well, there was a point where we were going to do the film where we were in preliminary R&D for the effects. It was expensive. It was something like 20 million dollars set aside for the *Ghost Rider* because it was all digital. And flame is something that has yet to be perfected. Usually now, even when you have elaborate pieces, they usually add a real flame element to it because flame is something that CG has not yet quite cracked. Recently, they learned how to crack fairly realistic hair. Flames are one of the holy grails that they still haven't been able to completely do and that's one of the reasons why we were doing so much R&D, because obviously flame is a big element.

What other projects do you have going on besides *Blade 3*?
I've got a pilot that I created with Clive Barker that I'm writing for HBO and the drama that I directed, *Zig Zag*, is going to be coming out in the fall. I am in the prepping stages for another that I am going to direct called *Mucho Mojo*, which I hope to be directing this summer in Texas. And we've been pre-pre-pre-production on an adaptation of a Neil Gaiman short story mystery—that will be also something that I will be directing. I am moving more into that.

Ultimately, what comic book would you like to see get the big screen transfer?
I would love to see a Fantastic Four movie.

Well, there was that horrible Roger Corman one... [laughs]
I'm talking about a real one. Ahh, I'd love to see a *Fantastic Four* movie and I'd love to see a *Dr. Strange* movie.

Oh, so are you a big Marvel or DC man?
I would say, because I grew up more on Marvel, I'd rather see more Marvel movies. Look, I'd love to see a big budget version of *The Flash*. I don't know if it would ever fly, but I think that it would potentially be, in terms of special effects, a blast to play around with.



HURLY BURLY BUNNY

The Muppets are dead. Long live Greg the Bunny, a stuffed animal that hopes to transform the face of the network sitcom

as told to **jon m gibson**

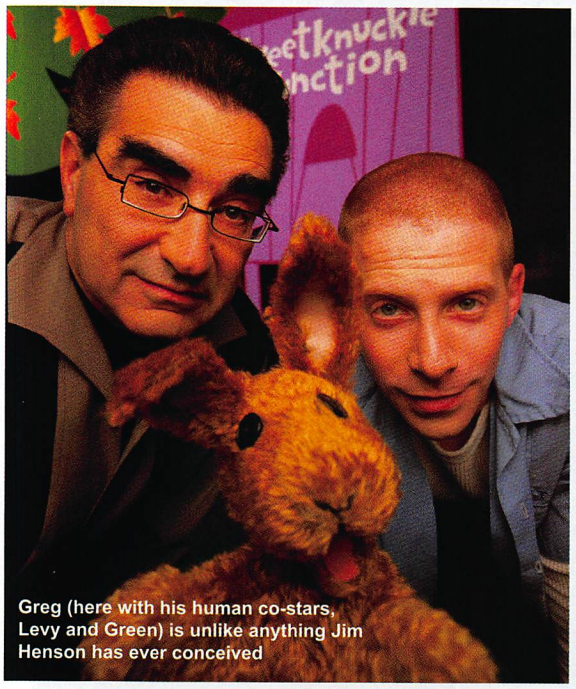
Okay, wrap yourself around this concept: *Greg the Bunny* is a show about the dysfunctional, behind-the-scenes antics of a puppet show dubbed *Sweetknuckle Junction*—in a world where stuffed animals and humans co-exist, nonetheless. Sure, it's like *Sesame Street* when the camera is rolling; but when the director yells "cut," the set takes a turn toward the wild side. So we tapped Greg, the furry rising star of the show, to teach us a few things about working on TV, why some "select" members from the cast of *Sesame Street* might be good in the sack, and the consequences of being an alcoholic puppet.

You're quite a crude bunny, aren't you?
I wouldn't describe myself is crude, I'm just not the type of bunny who's content to wriggle his nose and thump his little feet in order to melt hearts. I'm just a hard-workin' hare who wants a little respect, some admiration for a job well done, and perhaps an 18-foot trailer with Direct TV and a hot tub. Boiling pots of water are a weak substitute. Ever *see Fatal Attraction*? Thanks—but no thanks...

Isn't there a minimum height to be as cocky as you are? You're only about 10 inches tall.
I think the shorter you are, the more chips get stacked on your shoulders. Come on, I've got a lot of strikes against me in life—I'm tiny, I'm inhuman, I'm made out of velveteen... I'm not the first guy you're gonna pick out of the unemployment line. A guy like me's gotta be at least a little cocky to stand out in this business. Danny DeVito isn't producing his own films just because he can fit into your pocket. The man's got talent, and if you don't notice it outright, he'll shove it up your butt until you do.

Your co-star, Seth Green, is kind of a short fellow, too. You guys must get along great.
Seth is the only human co-star who doesn't put a crick in my neck—we'll put it that way. He's also quite respectful of the puppet community and welcomes our collaboration with open arms. Simply put, he's one of the good ones.

Sure, but there's gotta be some bad mo-fos on the set, too. Give me some dirt about your other co-stars, either fabricated or human.
Eugene Levy—good guy, straight-up. Doesn't hurt that his grandmother on his father's side was a puppet (note the eyebrows). Bob Gunton—a real pro, but I've been caught under his heel on more than one occasion. He always says it's an accident, but the guy's such a great actor I can't tell if he's bull-shitting me or not. Warren the Ape—worked with him for years on cable; let's just say it's a miracle he made it through the first season without being dragged off to Betty Ford. Count Blah is a kindly professional, a real pro, but don't let him corner you at the craft service table or he's gonna tell you long, drawn-out stories about his Corman-era film career, his romance with Mary Kay Place, and his ongoing lawsuit with the Sesame Street Count. Sarah Silverman is beautiful, kind, and funny. But she also has chronic diarrhea. Dina Waters is another lovable sweetheart—cuter than any puppet and twice as soft. She smells like a fancy magazine. She's married, but on I can't help wonder if she'd ever trade in



Greg (here with his human co-stars, Levy and Green) is unlike anything Jim Henson has ever conceived

"I'VE HAD MY EYE ON *SESAME STREET*'S PRAIRIE DAWN SINCE I FIRST GOT—MORE—FUR ON MY FIREMAN. BUT TRUTH BE KNOWN, I ACTUALLY HAVE A THING FOR 'QUEEN SARAH' ON *MR. ROGERS*."

-GREG THE BUNNY

her human mate for some cotton tail.

In all seriousness, though, *Greg the Bunny*, the show, is named after you, Greg, the Bunny. A national network comedy show on Fox is a big responsibility for such a fluffy, little hand puppet like yourself.

I fought hard contractually for the name title, out of pure ego. Now I'm scared witless that if the show tanks, I'll never live it down. Looking back, maybe we should have called the show, *Count Blah and Friends* or *American Pie Dad, Austin Powers Son and some Puppets*. There's a lot riding on me. But, of course, if the show's a hit, look for personalized footprints by yours truly on eBay for $19.95 a pop!

Aren't you intimidated by those Hollywood big shots that have been wandering around the set (like Curtis Hanson directing an upcoming episode and Gary Oldman starring)? I mean, come on, Oldman played Beethoven.

Hey, we're all professionals. Curt and I—I call him Curt, just don't tell him—got along famously. He said I had all the charm of Russell Crowe, but without the attitude. Or maybe it was *all* the attitude, but without the charm—I forget. Point is, he knows talent when he points his camera at it. Especially if he's locked into a contract that he signed one regretfully drunken night at Trader Vic's. As for stars like Oldman, they were young and hungry once, too. We all bleed the same (well, I bleed stuffing, but you get the point). Besides, it's true that Oldman played Beethoven, but come on, so did a *dog*—twice!—so how great can the guy be?

Actually, I think they squeezed a trilogy out of that dog. So since it obviously wasn't that lovable pup, who *was* your mentor through pup-perty? You must have had something synthetic to cling to during that special time in your life.

If you're speaking of static cling, I resent the implication. If you're talking about influences, I loved the work of Bunny Rabbit on Captain Kangaroo. He was the Charlie Chaplin, the Harpo Marx—minus the horn—of kiddie television. Such range and yet he never uttered one word. I also enjoyed the vulnerability of Grover the Monster and the highly marketable, in-your-face sarcasm of Alf. Of course, Alf had a bad time in and out of rehab after his show was pulled from the air, but I'm glad he's back doing phone commercials and I'd love to have him do a guest spot on our show.

My prayers have always been with Alf—even though he ate cats! Now, honestly, why should people watch? What do you offer that viewers can't get from Chandler, Monica, Rachel, Ross, Joey and Pheobe?

We offer five bucks a head! That's right, folks! Just for tuning in to my show, the good people at Fox Television will send you five—that's FIVE—crisp American greenbacks... wait... I'm... I'm getting some hand signals from the suits over there. What is... cut off my head? Oh, cut it OUT. Kill it. I gotcha. Uhm... so scratch that, I guess. Offer null and void in every state. Jeez, doesn't sound like we have much to offer you at all, then. Except, of course, the character, the comedy, and the chaos of a gaggle of uptight puppets and their exasperated human colleagues. Aside: Hey, and speaking of *Friends*, if my show tanks, you think Rachel could ever fall for a neurotic rabbit from Brooklyn? I'm at William Morris, folks—make the call and I'm there.

Give it up. She's petting Brad Pitt's head—not yours. So if the show's a hit, it'll run for 10 seasons and you'll be the richest bunny on the planet. Then what?

Then I start my dream of amusement parks/nostalgia restaurants/coin laundromats coming soon to your local mall. Greg the Bunny's Ride, Chow & Wash! That's right, people, you'll tour the Pirates of the Caribbean while you eat spicy curly fries, look at prop guns from *Battlefield Earth*, and bleach your unmentionables—ALL AT ONCE! Concept copyrighted by Greg the Bunny, 2002, all rights reserved.

And what about those summer-long breaks between. Any major motion pictures planned?

I've got a dream project I've been writing, a coming-of-age road picture that takes place in the post-apocalyptic future starring myself and Gary Coleman as time-travelling salesman who save the universe—and some shapely love interests—while trying to find the one-armed man who framed them for murder. So far I can't get it under any Hollywood doors, but if the show's a hit...

Anyways... how old are you anyway? You could be like the Easter Bunny and lie about your age.

The Easter Bunny not only lies about his age, but his existence as well. I mean, hey, I've never met him. As far as my age, I can play 5 to 25. Quite a range, if I do say so myself. I actually clock in just under 30, but now that I've had some eye surgery—replaced my buttons with eyeballs—the sky's the limit.

Alright, so you're younger then most other bushy-tailed celebs working in Tinseltown. So the ultimate question is: Could you take Roger Rabbit in a bare-knuckle fist fight?

It depends on the animators. Roger is two-dimensional and I'm three, so it's all up to whoever's working the CGI machines at Industrial Light + Magic. But I got 2000 bucks an animator that says I leave some pretty damaging marks. But knowing Roger, he'd just laugh it off anyway—the guy's got a good attitude.

Finally, who's the most shagable Muppet?

I've had my eye on *Sesame Street*'s Prairie Dawn since I first got—more—fur on my fireman. But truth be known, I actually have a thing for "Queen Sarah" on Mr. Rogers. Ooooh, your highness. Won't you be my neighbor? We'll keep it just between us, of course. Otherwise, King Friday will have my head.

STRONG, STRONG, STRONG

The members of Headstrong chat casually about conceiving their first music video, why Britney is hotter than Christina, and the many pop singers of the world that tend to lip-synch a little too excessively

Sure, Headstrong may not take Linkin Park off the charts with a drive-by success—they're not really TRL fare—but the band definitely has an edge worth paying attention to. Just admire their name for a moment and deconstruct: They have priceless wisdom that only age can provide (each member of the group is leaning on 30); and they're not reckless or cursed by a thick ego. In fact, Matt Kinna (vocals), Brian Matthews (drums), Joel Krass (guitar), and Jon Cohen (bass) are more humbled and educated than nearly all teenage rock bands combined—but they still have a sense of humor (surprising, because their music packs heavy, cerebral melodies and aggressive lyrics that challenge the likes of Stone Temple Pilots and Tool). In preparation for their self-titled debut album, which is currently circulating at record stores nationwide, we sat down with the guys in Los Angeles on the set of their first music video. As the director and crew set up the next shot, we indulged in a roundtable discussion, starting with the single in question, "Adriana."

What is the most annoying aspect of shooting a video?
Matt: It's been a really positive experience for us so far. The crew and the director made it a very comfortable situation. We were able to come down here with a couple of days to get things ready. It's not like we got here and all of the sudden...
Jon: These guys were wearing these clown outfits... [laughs]
Matt: It was very comfortable. We were all on the same page on what we wanted to do and how we were going to do it.

So you had a lot of input?
Joel: I would say the hardest part was sifting through the piles and piles of shit that got sent to us. People were just pulling stuff off of their treatment pile and saying, "I think this would be really unique for you guys." Then you see the treatment on TV two days later.

Are you prepared to deal with hearing your single, "Adriana," playing constantly, over and over again on the radio? And for the sake of fun, I'll compare it to Christina Aguilera's "Genie in a Bottle."
Matt: We're willing.
Jon: She's a label mate.
Joel: Oh, I'm in love with her. [smiling devilishly]

Britney or Christina, then?
Matt: Spears.
Brian: Spears.
Jon: Spears and N'Sync.

Joel, are you going to join the Britney Spears fan club, too?
Matt: Was that the question you were getting to? [laughs]

Okay, is it more enjoyable to listen or to play?
Jon: It's more fun to play it. When we were doing it yesterday, the amps weren't on or shit—Brian was playing with a dead drum kit. So it sounds like someone banging on cardboard. [laughs] You don't get tired of the live sound.
Brian: We've done a pretty good job of not listening to our stuff for a while in anticipation of something like this. We probably won't listen to it again for a little while, just to distance ourselves.

So concerts never get redundant, even though the audience always seems to be yearning for that "one" track.
Brian: Live, though—it's different, because when you put that energy and you're getting it back from the audience and you know that they like it and are responding to it, it makes it easier. As long as people are enjoying it and giving back good feedback, it's good to play.

Live is probably much better than in the studio, too.
Brian: Definitely.
Joel: A four-minute song live and a 400-minute song in the studio. [laughs] I think we spent about four months recording and an extra month mixing.
Brian: It was an interesting situation, 'cuz when we were signed and we were going to do an album, we basically had six or seven songs from the demos that we had done that we and the label both wanted to go ahead with and make a better recording of the songs. It was a matter of writing the other six songs—the other half of the album.
Joel: While we were in the studio.
Brian: Yeah, we went in and just started recording these first songs. When we had time—and towards the end the whole session, there were sessions where the producer wasn't even there. We would just go in and use the studio and start banging out some new songs.

The studio sparks creativity?
Brian: It's great. Writing in the studio is an amazing experience, because it's gratifying. Everything sounds good. And you can experiment with sounds a lot more easily. We

had all these machines working for us—all the cobtrollers and doo-dads and stuff like that.

Alright, how much of a difference was there between the tracks you walked in with and the ones you conceived in the studio?
Joel: Big difference. Probably our best stuff, actually, was written in the studio. And that may just be because we had been a band longer, and some of the stuff that we brought into the studio was old material. Or maybe it's because we were under the gun. We had pressure. We had to write good songs.

Was there really a lot of pressure?
Matt: There was, but we didn't feel it. We don't really feel pressure, I don't think.
Joel: We knew we had a deadline.
Jon: When it came down to, "We have two weeks left."
Joel: "Come on, guys, stop watching porn and start writing songs." [laugher consumes the room]
Brian: The biggest difference between the stuff in the studio and the stuff from before is: The stuff from before was all written on equipment that wasn't as good. We didn't have a budget or anything. We just played on all the crappy amps we bought as teenagers and the drum kit that I cracked five years ago. A lot of the more aggressive stuff on the album was stuff from before. And that's not to say that we're moving into a less aggressive theme. I think it's more aggressive because we had the shittier stuff and we really had to pound the shit out of it to really get the sound that we wanted out of it. In the studio, you don't have to.

Was "Adriana" in-studio?
Brian: Yes, it was one of the songs written and recorded in the studio.
Joel: I remember, when we were done with that one and listened to it, we were like, "What the hell kind of music is this?"

Well, the newer stuff is much lighter.
Brian: Definitely.
Joel: And we weren't trying to write a softer song or trying to write a radio song. It just came out like that. Actually, the first version of that song was all screaming and yelling and super, hyper-aggressive vocals. And we gave it to the label and they said, "Nahhhh, we don't really like it." "Well, we do like it." So we just came up with a new version by tweaking it a little bit.

Some of the songs seem like they'd be difficult to play live, though. Is there a lot of synthesizing throughout the album?
Jon: We use drum loops and that's it.
Matt: Definitely, in a live thing, things take on a different feel and have a life of their own. In person, that's the way it should be. And when you're in front of people, as opposed to getting behind a microphone with a spit screen on it in a studio. Because it's a sterile environment. I love being in the studio and I love recording, because just like Brian said, it's instantly gratifying. In a live setting, it's obviously gonna be a little more rough around the edges—not as pretty, but it's gonna be a lot more rock. It's about getting those kids in the front row and getting those kids in the back row to go, "Yeah," and nod their heads. I don't care if a kid sits in a chair. If he's nodding his head forward, then they're connecting with the music.
Jon: What we have in the studio is, we rely a lot on [the equipment], but we're able to add production elements to make the songs more interesting. Whereas, in a live setting, some of those production elements are absent.

With pop music nowadays, bands rely so much on electronic elements in their songs. It's sad, really. So it's refreshing to hear essentially unfiltered rock from you guys.
Joel: They're all singing to tapes, anyway.
Matt: Fifteen years ago, you'd be crucified for that shit. Remember Millie Vanille?
Joel: It doesn't even matter if it's a concert. When we were watching the Super Bowl two or three years ago, and Jewel was singing, I totally saw her start singing before the tape started.
Jon: You're relying on the lighting people and stuff like that to give the show, because she's gonna give the same performance every single time.

It's all about the backup dancers.
Joel: Yeah, the pop formula seems to be: Make a flurry of activity around the performer. Nobody will notice. If we put a lot of limbs in the way, no one will know which ones are hers.
Matt: [In a deep-throated spokesperson tone] Now with more dancers!

"THE POP FORMULA SEEMS TO BE: MAKE A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY AROUND THE PERFORMER. IF WE PUT A LOT OF LIMBS IN THE WAY, NO ONE WILL KNOW WHICH ONES ARE HERS."

On the rooftop of an abandoned LA warehouse, the soundstage for their "Adriana" video, the rock quartet pose for our camera (bottom photo, from left: Cohen, Matthews, Kinna and Krass)

DJ CRUSH

Gifted producer and DJ with a superb sense in mixing and composing his sound who's been well-received in the International club scene. It was the movie *Wild Side* that got him into hip-hop in the early 80s, and in 1987, he formed Krush Posse which made numerous appearances in various media as the best hip-hop act in Japan. Krush began pursuing his solo career after the break-up of the group in late 1992 and soon grabbed people's attention as the first DJ to use turntables as live instruments (such as doing free sessions with live musicians on stage). His first album, *Krush*, released in January '94, placed him internationally as a producer, remixer, DJ and recording artist. In Spring '98, he formed a production unit called Ryu with DJ Hide and DJ Sak, Collaborating with Nigerian percussionists and releasing a single and album as Ryu from Polydor Japan. From the end of the year 2000, he also got Involved in projects which evolves around a group of musicians aside from Krush, including DJ Spooky, That Subliminal Kid, DJ Disk, DJ Hide, DJ Ssak and Jun Sawada, which will launch various projects to question worldwide issues in the 21st Century.

I've being a fan of your music for some time now and I am always amazed at how each record is completely different. You don't repeat yourself. How do you keep your ideas fresh?
Listening to all kinds of music in all genres. Not just hip-hop, but jazz, r&b, rock… anything.

Your music is, dare I say it, experimental yet accessible. You seem to strike the perfect balance; do you aim for that in your music?
It's not something I particularly aim for. But on *ZEN*, I get similar comments. I guess it worked out this time.

The Japanese hip-hop scene has exploded in the last few years. How do feel about the cultural difference between the Japanese scene and the U.S. scene?
I guess the difference is what the rappers are saying, what DJs are trying to express. Since the environment or living circumstances are different in places around the world, of course the issues are sometimes different. But I believe hip-hop is about expression and expressing freely. So the "concept" is the same around the world.

I personally enjoy Rip Slyme and Dragon Ash. What are some other Japanese artists that you would recommend to a U.S. hip-hop fans?
There are a lot of up-and-coming talent in Japan. Props to any artists doing engaging in creative expression.

On remixing, you've worked with such a diverse roster of Japanese artists such as Luna Sea, M-Flo, Dragon Ash and more. Is there any U.S. artist you would like to remix? How about a Gorillaz remix. That would be awesome!
Yeah, I'd love to do a Gorillaz remix if I was asked… Remixing another way of being creative. It is a very different perspective from making my own records. I enjoy remixing songs from any genre. I really enjoyed remixing Miles Davis!

The market is now wide open for the independent producers to record professional tracks at home. Software like Cubase, Sonar and Acid have really revolutionized the way we can create music. What is your favorite way to record your tracks? Do you personally use any of these software tools for your music?
I just got a computer and am working with it. The software and tools are very convenient, but I feel like the quality of the music depends exclusively on the musician/artist/human being.

On your busy schedule, do you ever play video-games? Which of the big three (Xbox, GameCube or PS2) systems do you like best? Any favorite games?
I play PlayStation (the first one) and Dreamcast (they don't make it anymore right) I haven't upgraded to the new consoles yet.. I don't play as much as I used to because my kids kick my ass and it isn't fun anymore! I like role-playing adventure games too.

Have you ever been approached to work on a video-game soundtrack? Is that something that would interest you?
Yes, very much. I make music from a very visual place. I see a picture in my head and go about making music as a soundtrack to that picture, kind of like soundscapes. I have been approached but nothing has come to fruition yet. If there is a cool game in development, I am there!

What's next for you musically?
I just started working on my new album, my 7th original album. The concept is still a secret. I will be working with some brand new, awesome talent on it. Some Japanese, some international. I think I am going to make an upbeat album more for the club floor. Bigger beats, etc. I have so many ideas, I want to get into the studio and get started. It will be dropping in the Fall. Thank you for everyone's support on my last album, *ZEN*, and when I toured the US in November '01.

Any advice for the home music producer?
A lot of awful things are happening in the world, but be true to yourself and your creativity. Someone is always listening. Never forget your dreams. Peace!

QUEEN OF THE DAMNED ST

Warner Bros.

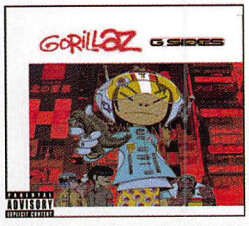
All of my vampire friends agree: The first two tracks on the Jonathan Davis produced *Queen of the Damned* soundtrack (by Wayne of Static X and David Draiman of Disturbed, respectively) are two of the best vampiric odes ever drudged up from the land of the living. The other original efforts from Chester Bennington of Linkin Park, Marilyn Manson, and Jay Gordon of Orgy (who knew?) are almost equally mesmerizing in a soundtrack as spectacular overall as the blessed actress who portrays Anne Rice's playful undead queen.

VARIOUS JAPAN FOR SALE VOL. 2

Sony Music Imports

You may never look at (or listen to) American pop and electronica the same way after sampling Sony Music Import's *Japan For Sale Vol 2*. While we've been busy with boy bands and Britney (hey now–I'm only into Britney for the visual dividends) Japanese artists have found new hooks and grooves we haven't even thought of yet. Innovating on par with our rap, hip hop,and modern rock artists, Ken Ishii, DJ Krush, Puffy Amiyumi and the surprising L'Arc-en-Ciel bring it on with such verve you'll be reaching for the cel phone to tell a friend. Hey, if we're nice–maybe they'll share. When my mom is diggin' the Grammys, you know it's time for a change!

GORILLAZ G SIDES



Virgin

"Latin Simone" in English, "19-2000" remixed, and the Japanese-y "Faust", make *G Sides* a must for anyone with ears. We're four holograms away from bliss people, support your local Gorillaz chapter!

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AVENGING FIST

Being the unofficial, bone-crunching live-action Tekken movie that Namco doesn't want you to see

A few years ago, producer Wong Jing announced the unofficial Hong Kong live-action adaptation of the *Tekken* game. Headed by the impressive all-star cast of Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Ekin Cheng, Cecilia Yip and Stephen Fung, and directed by Andrew Lau (*The Stormriders*) and Corey Yuen (Jet Li's choreographer), all the right ingredients seemed in place, and it would boast the most lavish HK production since *Stormriders*.

Wong Jing usually clings to the latest trend, which currently is the abuse of CGI. Just look at *Legend of Zu*, where overwhelming use of effects eliminated any semblance of story and ultimately only offered vapid—albeit sophisticated—visuals. He has tried this with *The Duel* and even attempted video-game material before with the silly *Future Cops* that blatantly ripped off characters from *Street Fighter* to *Dragon Ball*.

Developing the movie without Namco's permission was a mistake, precipitating the threat of a lawsuit. As a result, the film's name and characters' names were changed.

So what we have here is a movie that uses the game as inspiration, focusing on the main leads and discarding most everything else. It begs for additional refinement, but *Tekken* will appease fans of the game, entertaining with its kinetic energy and incessant movement.

Avenging Fist is set in a dark and futuristic world, recalling the compelling cityscapes portrayed in *Blade Runner* and *The Fifth Element*. It's all quite impressive, populated with flying vehicles and neon-covered blimps. As the film opens, we follow brother and sister Nova and Belle and their friend Jazz, as they make their way to the fighting arena. While there, Nova notices another strong fighter and, against his friend's advice, decides to fight with the stranger, Iron Surfer. After a brief manga-inspired fight, Iron Surfer is defeated and Belle takes an immediate liking to him. Jazz and Nova have learned the Avenging Fist from their mother, Wing, whose late husband, Thunder, developed before he was mysteriously killed 20 years ago while working in a government project named POWER GLOVE. He created the Avenging Fist fighting style to complement the POWER GLOVE. Used properly, the POWER GLOVE can grant the wearer omnipotence, by accessing a special part of the brain called the Forbidden Zone. Nova will soon come into possession of the glove and discover the truth about his father's death, gaining the attention of the evil Combat 21 and his fascist Red Dragon Army. The fate of the world will soon be decided, as unlikely heroes join Nova in his battle against Combat 21's ever-increasing powers.

This is as close as it gets to a literal video-game translation to the silver screen, if only in spirit. Spectacular battles with impossible physics are abound in *Avenging Fist*. While the story is just adequate, the visuals do keep you involved, especially if you watch the trailer first; I was anxiously waiting for the Ogre monster to show up, and when he did it was a brief but *very* cool scene. The pacing lags a little in the middle, and the introduction of a clumsy romance doesn't help much. Those looking for straight martial arts action will be disappointed.

The film uses wirework, CGI, offbeat cinematography, editing and music to create fight sequences that have the feeling of a manga in motion. Expert martial artist Yuen Biao and Sammo Hung are criminally under-used and, since its lead stars aren't martial artists themselves, that might explain the lack of bone-crunching fights. Sammo does get a few shining moments as detective Dark: He gets to deliver some great lines and show off some nice heroics. However, the less said about Eking Cheng's brief, blink-and-you'd-miss-me cameo as a young Sammo the better. This is not the Stormrider killer we where hoping for, but a fun and enjoyable film nonetheless. It should keep fans happy until the official U.S. adaptation shows up. If you can find the import DVD, it will fit nicely next to your *Mortal Kombat: Special Edition*.

EG

NICE PAD

by dave halverson

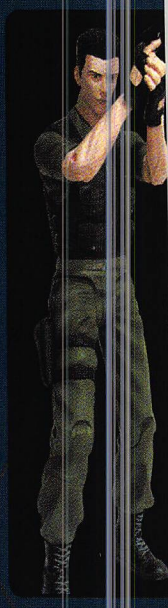
Control pads being the conduit through which we play, the importance of finding the right fit for your particular needs is vital. While the stock Xbox pad is great in terms of quality, it's big (yah-yah-yah) and the tiny buttons, grouped on a slant underneath the two black and white skittles, take some getting used to. If you're in the market for a replacement or a second pad, here's how the pack stacks up: A) Mad Catz officially licensed pad ($34.99) boasts a macro feature for programming moves, but most importantly it feels solid and has phenomenal grip, due to the grooved rubber handles. The pressure-sensitive buttons stick way up, and the b&w buttons are conveniently set apart from the cluster. The analogs are smooth, but lose and the D-pad smokes the stock pad. If you like the big size this is the controller of choice. B) The Saitek Adrenalin pad ($24.95) is the biggest departure design-wise (we hear if you throw it comes back to you–always a plus) which I suppose is it's sole selling point. It feels weird in your hands, the analogs are loose, and the buttons are way too close together. C) Pelican's Trick Pad ($24.99) is best small pad currently available in the U.S. The programmable clear green pad has a one-button combo feature, and feels great. The buttons are arranged well, feel excellent, and the pad overall–wrapped in a textured rubber X–is nice and sticky. The D-Pad is only okay, but the dual sticks feel great. D) The king of all Xbox pads! The stock Japanese controller (market price, like the lobster) is one of the best pads ever created for any console. The button cluster is arranged perfectly (this really should be the standard), with countersunk black and whites underneath the main 4, the analogs are closer together (and nice and tight) and the D-Pad is outstanding. The drawback? Currently this pad is only available in Japan, so you'll have to contact your local importer.

The only wireless solution for the PS2 ($59.99), MadCatz 900 MHz wireless is about all you could hope for in a wireless pad. No batteries required (it runs 5-6 hours on a single charge), a micro antenna plugs into the PS2 (or PSone), and sends out a powerful signal allowing you to play anywhere in the room. It's a quality pad too, with rubber grips, excellent feel overall, dual vibration motors, and a macro feature for game-specific programming. With any luck MadCatz will offer a second pad separately in the future, so you always have a charged unit ready to go for extended play.

MadCatz GameCube pad–the Cubicon–is a solid choice for a second pad, especially if you're looking for something a little larger than the stock unit. At $19.99 the price is right too, and it boasts solid construction, programmable macros and pressure sensitive buttons. We still like the stock pad better, but we're silly like that.

:: WONDERFUL TOYZ

Far right–Palisades Marketing latest in the Resident Evil saga, look for *RE3* figures coming soon to a store near you or inquire online at PalisadesToys.com. Below, and currently much harder to find, the toys (by Epoch) attached to Gainax' (Evangelion) latest masterpiece, FLCL should be heading stateside soon after the DVD, wherever that is... Below middle, the Metropolis Kubricks from the Columbia pictures anime epic. Contact your local importer.



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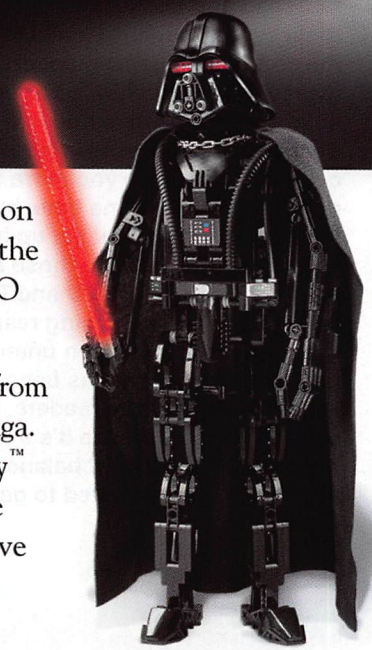

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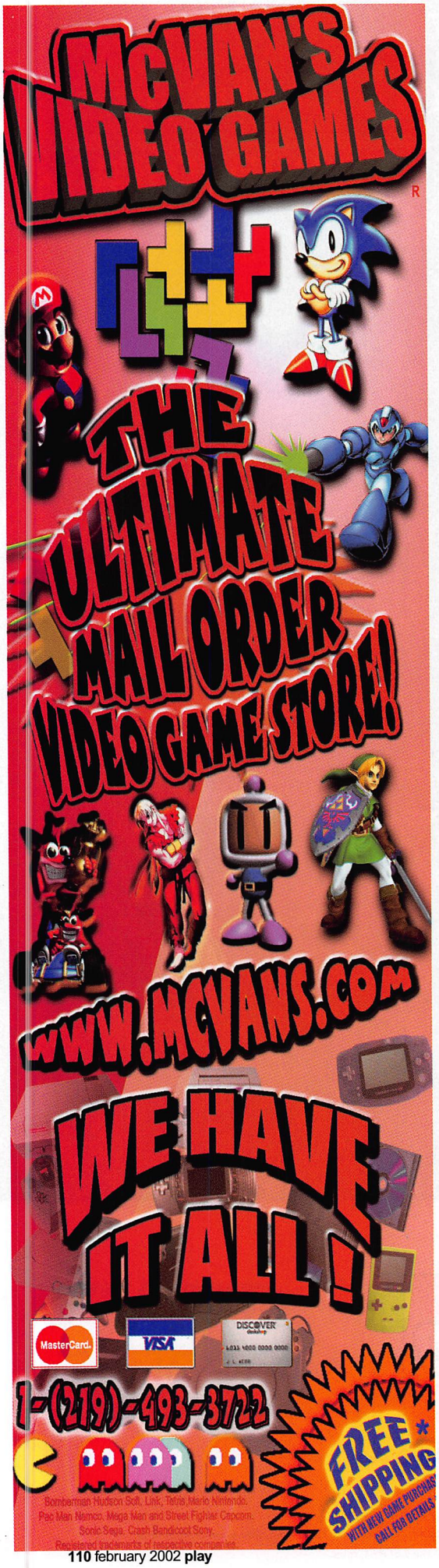

Whether you have questions, criticism, or if you just need to vent or say what's on your mind, write us here at PLAY. It's time to get a major forum going... off-line. Email your queries to:

talk@play-magazine.com

Dear PLAY,

I've noticed a gap comparing the various video game magazines, regarding scores. Most recently, though, it has really hit home as one of the games I'm most looking forward to as a new Xbox owner, Gun Valkyrie, the subject of your March cover (which I have to say is one of the most beautiful magazine covers I have ever seen), seems to be getting mixed reviews. As someone's who's been playing games for around ten years, I consider myself an above average game player and the way you describe GV has me counting the days to its release. Why do you suppose it's not looked at the same across the boards? How do you guys categorize yourselves comparatively speaking to the competition? I'm going to buy the game either way. I have JSRF and I LOVE it! So, I trust you. But you're new, so maybe everyone doesn't realize you're probably right. I was also wondering–does Sega get mad when this happens?

Neo

You bring up an interesting subject. I think that some of the other magazines rate games on a different curve as they are aimed at a wider overall audience. Your average casual game player who came on the scene post 16-bit probably isn't going to be after Gun Valkyrie, while any hardcore gamer will be completely enthralled by it. It's an amazing game, but it's hard. Tough levels, and even tougher bosses. I seriously doubt most reviewers cracked the first few levels. When it comes to games of this nature, I can assure you, we turn them inside and out. I'm still playing GV and will continue to until I know every inch of it. We take our reviews very, very seriously here, and we stand by them. You can take that to the bank. Does Sega get mad? I think they get frustrated. I got a call from them recently regarding this very thing. I feel for Smilebit, they are sooo talented, and to have such a beautiful game get torn up, it must really hurt. Just keep reading PLAy and you'll be fine.

Dear PLAY,

I love the overall layout of the magazine and your anime section is the best there is. However, I really think games should be reviewed by more than just one person. This allows the reader to make a more sound judgment based on a larger collective of information. Also I'd like to see you make PLAY one part less "Rolling Stone" and one more part old GameFan. Like any red-blooded American, I enjoy a wide variety of music, movies, and TV, but if they're going to be in my gaming mag, I'd like to see more of a tie-in with games and anime, especially when it comes to music. I like hearing other opinions about domestic music releases, but I'd like your music section a whole lot more if I could read up on the hottest game and anime soundtracks. The media is okay as-is, but please try and incorporate more of a gamer friendly feel.

J. Eldred

Multireviews are a double-edged sword, the at-a-glance convenience is nice, but logistically they're a nightmare. A game isn't like a movie where you can sit down for two hours and take it all in. There's simply no way three editors can all beat a 30-50 hour game within a 3 week span with so many games pouring in, press junkets, office debates, and everything else that goes on producing a game magazine. The game companies only send out one disc, but even if we requested multiple copies, it's just not possible for us all to play every game long enough to write a responsible review. Early games can only be played on special debug units as well, and they are in short supply. We've all been down that road and decided early on to ditch them even though we know readers like the at-a-glance convenience. We feel that by assigning a review to the editor most suited, readers interested in a particular genre get a solid, poignant review. We couldn't agree with you more on the music. It's taken some time, but we finally have a correspondent set up in Japan to get us soundtracks, so those are coming. We hear you on the DVD and TV coverage too, but the overwhelming response on those sections has been unanimously positive. Our format has been met with much adulation from readers, industry, and retailers, but we realize it's a work in progress. Striking the right balance is definitely key, and we're dedicated to getting it just right.

play on the airwaves

Readers in the Los Angeles area, mark your calendars!!!

The head honchos at **play**, along with a few junior honchos, will be joining our favorite tech heads Marc Cohen and Mark Oleesky, hosts of KABC Radio's Computer and Technology Show, to talk all things games, take your calls, and generally cause a nuisance.

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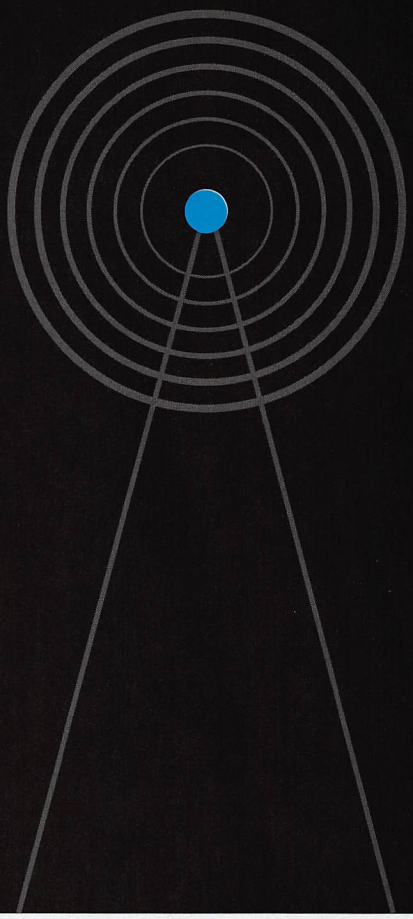

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Special Thanks: Peter Nguyen, Bryce Baer, Kirsten Merit, Peter Moore, Mike Fischer, Wiebke Vallentin, Ed Fries, Alex Skillman, Tina Casalino, Rod Peters, Danielle Garnier, Kjell, Michelle and Denny from Eidos, Hillary Crowley, Rich Goffman, John Ledford, John O'donnell, Marvin Gleicher, Tara Blanca, Laura heeb, Lane Savitsky (you are the man) Linda Duttenhaven, and you!

PLAY Magazine* (ISSN 1537-7539) is published monthly by Fusion Publishing, Inc., 31255 Cedar Valley Drive, Suite 313, Westlake Village, CA 91362. Application to mail at Periodical Postage Paid at Thousand Oaks, CA and additional mailing offices. Single issue rates: $5.99, yearly newsstand value: $71.88. The one year (12 issue) subscription rate is $34.99 in the U.S., $44.99 in Canada, and $64.99 in all other foreign locales. Checks must be made payable in U.S. currency only to PLAY Magazine. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PLAY Magazine, P.O. Box 500, Missouri City, TX 77459. For subscription service questions, call (888)922-6122 We periodically make lists of our customers available to mailers of goods and services that may interest you. If you do not wish to receive such mailings, please write to us and include a copy of your mailing label. Please allow 6-8 weeks before receiving your first issue, as well as for any subscription changes to take place on any existing subscription. The editors and the publisher are not responsible for unsolicited materials; all unsolicited material becomes the property of Fusion Publishing, Inc. Without limiting the rights of copyrights reserved herein, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written notice of Fusion publishing, Inc. To reuse any material in this publication, obtain a permission request form by contacting Fusion Publishing, Inc. at (818)707-7786 [phone} or (818)707-7212 [fax]. © Fusion Publishing, Inc. All Rights Reserved, Play Magazine*, Fusion Publishing*, Play: Girls of Gaming*, Play: The Calendar*, Fusion Publishing Presents * are trademarks and copyrights of Fusion Publishing, Inc. * and © for all other products and the characters contained therein are owned by the respective trademark and copyright owners. All materials listed in this magazine are subject to manufacturers change and the publisher assumes no responsibility for such changes.

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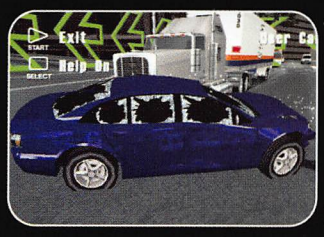

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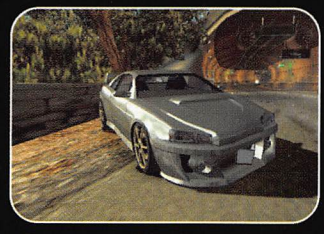

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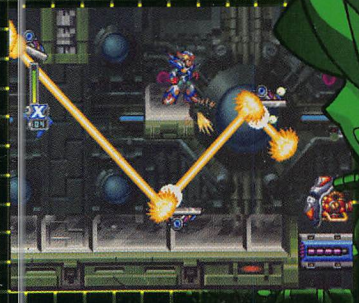

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